Social Reforms in Saudi Arabia, 1991-2010

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DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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DECLARATION

I declare that the thesis entitled ***Social Reforms in Saudi Arabia, 1991-2010*** submitted by me for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of Jawaharlal Nehru University is my own work. The thesis has not been submitted for any other degree of this University or any other university.

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CERTIFICATE

We recommend that this thesis be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

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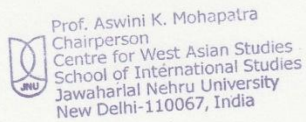

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Chapter One

Introduction

Saudi Arabia is a country of contrasting realities. It is considered as one of the most 'conservative' monarchies in the world where ulema have considerable influence over state and society. At the same time, the ruling al-Saud family has used oil wealth and 'rentier social contract' to build a 'modernised' Kingdom with latest infrastructure in education, health care, transport and communication, administration and economy to provide a lavish and affluent lifestyle for a large section of its population. In the early 20th century, with the exception of Hejaz region[1], large parts of the Arabian Peninsula was still a non-descript desert and the discovery and commercial production of petroleum since the late 1930s together with the establishment of the Kingdom began a process of change and development leading to an unprecedented economic growth in the decades to come. These changes, notwithstanding, the society remained largely mired in 'tradition' mainly because 'social change' could not match the alacrity of economic growth (Niblock, 1982; Algosaibi, 1995). In fact, one of the most remarkable and defining aspects of evolution of Saudi Arabia is the gusto for economic 'developments' but apathy towards social 'progresses'.

Saudi Arabia, like any other society, has gone through numerous stages of development and change. The earliest stage predates discovery and commercial production of oil when the Kingdom was taking its current shape. The period was marked with political instabilities and intense rivalries among various claimants of power including the current ruling al-Saud family (Kostiner, 1993; Al-Rasheed, 2010; Wynbrandt 2010). The socioeconomic situation was mired in predominance of nomadic and tribal lifestyle (Dickson, 1949; Lipsky, 1959). Transition started with formation of the Kingdom in 1932, discovery of oil in 1938 and commercial production in the late 1940s, leading to relative economic stability and a degree of socioeconomic change spurred by and

[1] Hejaz ruled by the Hashemite family had links with the outside world due to Hajj and was the only area in the Peninsula with some semblance of urban infrastructure and amenities.

around the petroleum industry (Lipsky, 1959; Bronson, 2006). A state-sponsored incentive-based plan for settling the nomadic population took shape during this period (Khateeb, 1981; Fabietti, 1982). The newly formed Kingdom sustained itself with the help of traditional alliances based on religion, marriage and kinship together with the outside support and later with the oil-wealth (Al-Rasheed, 2010; Vassiliev, 2013). Commercial production of oil led to a surge in revenues and provided the monarchy with wealth to obtain loyalty and acquire prestige. Rudimentary but significant developments in economic and administrative structures and education system were also remarkable achievement during this period (Umar, 1985; Foley, 2011).

In the next stage that begins with the 1973 oil-boom , the society experienced massive changes due to abundance of wealth and investments on various developmental plans giving shape to modernised administrative institutions, industries and economic growth and social change with near eradication of nomadic and Bedouin lifestyles, rapid growth in cities and mushrooming of towns (Farsy, 1986; Algosaibi, 1995). This period witnessed expansion of the state and its arms, and impacts of what has been described as the ‘rentier economy’ and ‘social contract’ models (Niblock, 1982; Hertog, 2009). In this phase, education system witnessed expansion, judiciary took an organised shape and economy became stable. Industrialisation, infrastructure development, rapid urbanisation and influx of expatriate workers were other important markers of change. A number of domestic, regional and international events gave rise to religious revivalism; however, the liberal voices were also witnessed, even though they could never attract support from a majority of the Saudi population (Dekmejian, 2003; Lacroix, 2004; Rapheli, 2005).

A new phase starts in the aftermath of the Kuwait Crisis (1990-91) mainly due to growing internal demands for political, economic and education reforms. Since then, Saudi society witnessed a gradual transition inter alia due to globalisation, modern education and manifestations of ‘reformist’ leanings of the monarchy. The overlapping of religious beliefs, traditional practices and modern understandings of life ushered in changes in individual behaviours, cultural practices and religious understandings. A tribal society which was based on kinship and familial alliances witnessed rapid urbanisation and demographic changes and a gradual socio-cultural opening. Economic

growth, religious revivalism and changes in the political economy impacted the society and created demands for reforms, which broadened due to a continuous pressure for change from within. Resultantly, the society experienced substantial and unprecedented changes during the 1990s and 2000s, which is the focus of this research.

Notwithstanding internal demands for reforms, external pressures, especially after the 11 September 2001 attacks in the US, are significant in pushing the al-Saud to take reform initiatives for better education, women's rights, political participation and improving human rights. Additionally, alignment of the Saudi economy with the global ushered changes in many aspects of people's life. The most important agent of these external elements are forces of globalisation in terms of economic penetration of multi-national companies (MNCs) and pressures created by the US and the West to counter extremist forces. International public opinion galvanised by reports of rampant human rights violations and accusations of fomenting religious fundamentalism have also put pressure on the monarchy to bring reforms.

These external factors, as discussed in the following chapters, have been instrumental in forcing the Saudi monarchy to improve the functioning of the political system. Though it remains the domain of the ruling family, some features have been introduced since the 1990s such as the *Majlis al-Shura*, the National Dialogue and Municipal elections which have opened doors for popular participation (Zuhur, 2005; Kéchichian, 2013; Thompson, 2014). Similarly, the US pressures for reforms in the education system and curriculum resulted in the Kingdom introducing new education policy in 2005 and efforts to improve the functioning of schools, reducing religious content in curriculum and new text books, and emphasis on science and mathematics under the *Tatweer* programme (Khashoggi, 2006; Shea, 2006). Reforms in education included teacher's training and better monitoring of schools and inclusive approach towards girl's education. Impacts of external pressure on the social reform process, however, is far less than the internally induced process of change and reforms. Moreover, Saudis have cautioned against exaggerating external reasons for the change arguing that "foreign pressure would neither increase the pace of reform not discourage it" and that "pressure, particularly from America, would work to the advantage of religious extremists and undercut the legitimacy of the process of reform" (Walker Jr., 2004).

Broadly, there are three important internal actors that have been influential and who at times have worked in tandem or have been at cross roads. The first is the al-Saud family and its political, economic and religious allies. The second is ulema that include both establishment and independent ulema who have played the role of the upholder of tradition and advocate cultural and religious conservatism and have significant influence in the politics, economy and the society. The third actor, referred to as 'liberals' and 'reformists' in this thesis, are intellectuals, academics, journalists who advocate reforms and want the society to progress without necessarily losing its religious character. They represent the voices of the surging educated middle classes of Saudis who demand economic prosperity, better health and education facilities and job opportunities pushing the monarchy to bring reforms.

The research argues that the pressure created by the internal elements has been far more effective in creating the grounds for changes and reforms. For example, the education system has been expanded not only because of external pressures but also because of the surging demands from the middle classes. Many Saudis argue that the impacts of expansion in the education system are far greater than the piecemeal reforms in school curriculum. Even the changes in school textbooks and curriculum were advocated for long by local intellectuals and their consistent efforts to counter anti-reform religious narratives cannot be ignored. Similarly, as demonstrated in the chapters, the role of internal elements and demands from within are more effective in bringing change in areas such as women's rights, media and civil society functioning, health sector and a degree of freedom in cultural activities such as arts and literature.

In order to demonstrate that the internal demands for reforms have a far greater impact compared to external pressures, the research has chosen to analyse four important aspects of the Saudi society, namely, demography, social structure, status of women and role of religion and ulema. These are the areas where change and reforms are visible and which have broadly impacted the society. Saudi Arabia has witnessed significant demographic transition leading to population growth, internal migration, urbanisation and increase in the number of cities. It has also been defined in terms of 'baby boom' and 'youth bulge' that have not only changed the demography but also created policy challenges. In addition, the society has witnessed changes in the structure with

transformation to a predominantly settled population which has affected not only its tribal character but also had far deeper impacts on social institutions such as family, marriage and tribe. At the same time, these demographic and structural changes not only impacted questions of identity where sectarian, ethnic and regional fault lines became pronounced but also gave way to emergence of a 'composite' though 'hegemonic' Saudi national identity.

The other important area where reforms have brought change and where internal demands have created scope for change is the status of women. Saudi women face numerous systemic discriminations but have been able to negotiate these problems in their quest to acquire education and find employment. While their socioeconomic status has improved, their struggle for basic rights continues to be scuttled by religious and cultural restrictions. These discriminations emanate from the influence of clergy upon the society and polity and the degree to which tradition and cultural practices determine 'acceptable' limits. Despite this restrictive role, the way people practice religion has witnessed changes and the influence wielded by the ulema too has come to be compromised. In this respect, the society continues to be devoutly adherent to Islam, predominantly Wahhabi Islam, but changes at the individual level can be noted with changing lifestyles and attitudes towards religion and ulema.

Since the early 1990s, Saudi society witnessed significant changes in its demography, social structure, status of women and role of religion and ulema. Contemporary scholarship on Saudi Arabia focuses largely on the state and its policies. State-centric analyses either critical or appreciative of the Kingdom, however, ignore the contributions and conditions of the people, which is what this research focuses on while analysing the changing contours of life of Saudis from a social perspective. Of course, the role of monarchy has been discussed but as an actor among others and not as the subject. A policy of 'social *infitah*' (social opening) has been pursued by the monarchy ever since it recognised the need to purge religious extremism and improve educational standards and condition of women and this has been an important factor in bringing the question of reform to the fore that were ignored during a significant part of its history.

An important aspect in the social reforms process that should be noted is the inherent and inbuilt resistance in Wahhabi ideology towards change. Wahhabi Islam as has been discussed in Chapter Two abhors change and does not recognise scope for plurality in Islam. It calls for going back to the earliest generations of Muslims to ‘reform’ the society and fulfil the mandate of Allah to establish a ‘pristine’ and ‘God fearing’ society. It articulates the need for establishing a political system that upholds the sovereignty of Allah on earth and implements the teachings of the Prophet. However, its interpretations of the Quran and Sunnah are based on uniformity and conformity and imposition of the ‘wills of Allah’ from the above without any scope for human-induced change. This created a situation where political change is negligent but in spite of this limitation, social reforms are a reality.

Before examining the available literature it is important to discuss the frequently used terms in the thesis. Firstly, it is important to clarify the use of terms ‘social reforms’ and ‘social change’ that have been frequently and interchangeably used in the thesis. Social reform can be defined as a process of change occurring in the structures and culture of a society as a result of a conscious effort by forces within the society. Social change, on the other hand, is a larger process which is linked with the deconstruction of the setup and even basis of the society. It can be defined as alterations in the underlying structures of a society over a period of time. Anthony Giddens argues that when it comes to human societies, “to decide how far and in what ways a system is in a process of change”, it has to be assessed “to what degree there is any modification of basic institution during a specific period” (Giddens, 2006: 45). The research is focussed on ‘social reforms’ in the sense that it examines the processes, factors and agents of the changes in contemporary Saudi Arabia and does not intends to go deeper into the larger process of ‘social change’. However, a critical understanding of the reform process cannot be discerned without a comprehensive examination of the society and its important actors, fault lines and historical land marks. In this context, the term ‘change’ has been used sometime simultaneously with ‘reforms’ and at times interchangeably.

There are other terms such as ‘traditional’, ‘conservative’, ‘modern’, ‘modernisation’ or ‘progress’, which require some clarification at this stage. Tradition can be understood as a belief or behaviour that has been passed down within a group or community with

some symbolic meaning and importance attached to it and the origins of which can be located in the past. In case of Saudi Arabia, the most important aspect about tradition is that social customs continue to have a high position in the system of values and the term traditional has been used to underline this characteristic and not in any way means that the society as a whole is 'backward' looking. The research is, therefore, focused on the social reform process and delineates the idea that the entire society is 'traditional' in nature from the idea that 'traditional' ethos are held dear by a large section of the population. Similarly, the term 'conservative' has been used to underline the attitude of a section of the society that emphasises on preserving what it considers as the 'local', 'Saudi', 'Arab' and 'Islamic' ethos against the 'Western', 'foreign', 'alien' and 'un-Islamic' ethos. This should not mean that the Saudi society has to be understood as 'conservative' as a whole which is how it is largely described in media and even in academic literature (Goldrup, 1971; Champion, 2003; Commins, 2006; House, 2012). It is important to understand that there are many shades of the ideas 'to conserve' and many of them do exist in the Saudi society.

The other frequently used terms in the research 'modernity', 'progress' and 'modernisation' have been used in specific meanings. 'Modernity' which is a very significant terms and has attracted numerous academic enquiry has been used in its most generally used meaning; as a process that demarcates the ancient and medieval worlds from the new world that came to emerge after the European enlightenment. The term 'progress' is used in its most general meaning of acceptance of change and not in a value added idea of a society being 'progressive' or not. Thus, the terms 'modernity' and 'progress' have been used to not judge the society as being 'modern' or 'progressive' rather to explain specific phenomena. The term 'modernisation' has been used in the meaning of material aspect of use of science and technology and market oriented economic developments and is not used in the meaning of a larger process of normative social change.

Another significant term 'Wahhabism' needs some clarification. It is used in the research to indicate the brand of Islam that emerged from the teachings of 18th century religious reformer Muhammad bin Abdul Wahhab. In Saudi Arabia, the term is considered derogatory and is regarded as Western labelling to undermine the

significance of the religious reform movement. Largely, Saudis prefer the terms such as *Muwahhidun* (Unitarians), *Harkat al-Tawheed* (movement for Oneness of God), *al-Dawah al-Salafiya* (Salafi preaching) or *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'a* (people of the Prophetic traditions and consensus) over what is generally referred to as 'Wahhabism' in academic literature. To avoid confusion and due to the absence of a better term that encompasses various facets of the movement and its socio-political significance, the expression 'Wahhabism' is used in this thesis.

Survey of the Literature

There is a significantly large collection of works that study various aspects of developments in contemporary Saudi Arabia. It was not possible to examine all of them and at the same time it was necessary to not leave out any important work that provides insights into aspects of Saudi society. In this section, an effort is made to examine relevant literature with a thematic division for better comprehension. The literature is discussed under five themes, namely, *role of Islam and ulema; state and the society*; *demography and social structure*; *reforms in Saudi Arabia*; and *status of women*. The literature survey suggests that Saudi society has largely been studied with a state-centric approach and many key social developments that impact various facets of the collective and individual lives of Saudis have been ignored.

Role of Islam and Ulema

Wahhabi Islam plays a very important role in every aspect of life in Saudi Arabia. It is not just a set of faith or belief and rituals practiced by individuals, rather the collective way of living and to be in accordance with the religion. The ulema play the role of keeper of collective conscience of people to live their life according to the set of religious rules and the state gives authority to these ulema, gaining religious legitimacy in return. Religious police (*mutawwa*) is used to enforce compliance with religious laws as decided by the ulema. The ruling family has strong links with the religious authorities that, in turn, make it easier to have a close link with the people, which work as a force that helped the ruling family in the formation of the monarchy and enables the administration of the Kingdom (Al-Yassini, 1985; Kéchichian, 1986; Al-Rasheed, 2006).

The state puts emphasis on observation and promotion of Islam and derives legitimacy from it on the basis of adherence to Wahhabi Islam. On the surface, it gives an impression of a typical religious society where life revolves around the belief system, thus, in the words of Ghassan Salamé, Islam "permeates the Saudis' daily life" (Salamé, 1987: 306). The education system depends on and derives heavily from Islam and there is a large network of institutions for dissemination of religious education. Nearly one-third of public school teaching is occupied by religion (Bahgat, 1999; Ochsenwald, 2001; Prokop, 2003). Judiciary depends on *shari'a* for all civil and criminal matters and is predominantly served and managed by Wahhabi ulema (Aba-Namay, 1999; Vogel, 2000; Kèchichian, 2013). The same is true for politics whereby state derives legitimacy from Wahhabi Islam and the majority of opposition figures and organisations use the same Wahhabi interpretations to challenge and delegitimize al-Saud rule; for example, Juhayman al-Uthaibi in 1979, Sahwa movement in the 1990s and al-Qaeda.

It has been well articulated by a number of scholars that religion is the main source of legitimacy not just for the state and the royal family but also for seeking respect and social status. The society is deeply embedded in religion which is seen as the basis of inspiration for all aspects of life including politics and socio-cultural changes (Yamani, 2004; Al-Rasheed, 2006). Islam is a predominant factor that has shaped the society and plays the most important role in the private lives of individuals and the collective life of the people, something the ruling family has repeatedly reiterated through various legislations and administrative structures (Aba-Namay, 1993; Nevo, 1998). The 1991 Gulf crisis had a deep impact on the social, religious and political atmosphere of Saudi Arabia with the rise of 'neo-Wahhabi' opposition, especially the al-Qaeda. The presence of the non-Muslim American Women soldiers also did not help the matter. As the ruling family found itself isolated for seeking the support of foreign 'infidel' forces to secure its people and rule, it gave more freedom to the religious establishment and strengthened the position of al-Shaikh in the socio-political panorama of the country (Yamani, 2004).

Scholars suggest that one of the most prominent influences of religion and religious leaders can be found in the field of education. The ulema have predominant stake and say in education at all levels including school and higher education as well as women's

education. Historically, the clergy has monopolised the education system; however a number of changes have been witnessed during the past decades whereby their dominance on the policy level has declined. But due to the dependence of the monarchy on ulema for legitimacy and their long-standing commitment for the spread of Wahhabi Islam that goes back to the foundation of first Saudi emirate in the mid-18th century, the ruling family has continued its support to the clergy and has extended their policy of the conscience-keeper of the society. On the other hand the ulema have opposed reforms fearing loss of their dominance on education system and the society (Prokop, 2003; Doran, 2004; Al-Rasheed, 2006).

The interplay of religion and culture is deep-rooted in the society which is patrimonial in nature as cultural and religious practices play important roles in the day-to-day lives of individuals. Over a period of time this traditional relationship among religion, culture and society has experienced numerous changes which have been the part of a larger process of evolution of modern structures of the state (Al-Yassini, 1985). It is this process of change that has given rise to the call for socio-political reform within an Islamic framework through the revision and re-interpretation of official religious doctrines (Lacroix, 2004; Al-Atawaneh, 2011).

There is a consensus among scholars that religion and the religious establishment play a very important role in the lives of Saudis (Lipsky, 1959; Nevo, 1998; Hamza, 2002; Bradley, 2006; Al-Rasheed, 2006; Niblock, 2006; Alshamsi, 2011; House, 2012). Joseph Nevo (1998) suggests that the individual and collective lives of people in Saudi Arabia are moulded by religion, particularly the Wahhabi version and it plays an important role in the formation of the national identity. Anne Rathbone Bradley (2006) argues that the Saudi social arena is largely controlled by the state and religion, that is, people's life and the interactions between various social institutions are influenced and directed by religion and state. She further contends that the monarchy plays the role of an interfering state and ulema aligned with the state take upon themselves the task of keeping the cultural realm under the control within a specific set of rules on the basis of faith and its Wahhabi interpretations (Bradley, 2006).

State and the Society

The Saudi state and society has been seen as religious to the extent of being dogmatic and many scholars have argued that the state policies harbour fundamentalism and foment extremism (Algar, 2002; Commins, 2006). This has been explained by many as a result of predominance of Wahhabi Islam in the state and society that leads to a situation where the state cannot digress from the mandates of Wahhabi teachings (Humphreys, 1979; Layish, 1984; Al-Yassini, 1985; Bligh, 1985; Farsy, 1986; Nevo, 1998; Yamani, 2000; Yamani, 2004; Al-Rasheed, 2006; Al-Rasheed, 2010; House, 2012). This view, however, disregards the fact that Wahhabism is more a political-religious ideology than a social construct and thus cannot explain social processes (Hopwood, 1982; Niblock, 1982; Niblock, 2006; Kèchichian, 1986; Al-Atawaneh, 2009; Haj, 2006). The view also ignores that in contemporary Saudi Arabia the state, political economy and society have moved in different directions compared to puritanical interpretations of Wahhabi Islam.

There are others who tend to employ modern-liberal frameworks to explain the phenomenon of religious extremism and social change and developments in the society and the political economy of change in Saudi Arabia (Philby, 1946; Philby, 1955; Dickson, 1949; Gaury, 1950; Holden, 1966; Stoakes, 1972; Niblock, 1982; Al-Naqeeb, 1990; Abir, 1993; Algosaibi, 1995; Fandy, 2009; Jones, 2010; Yizraeli, 2012). The problem, however, is that this approach does not fully explain the processes of change as these are alien to Saudi context and have evolved in a different time and space (Said, 1978). This approach ignores the significance of local cultural and religious ideals and practices, thus failing to explain the processes and churnings in the society.

Scholars have mostly taken a non-pragmatic position in examining the relationship and historiography of Saudi state, religion and society in Saudi Arabia. For instance, Ayman al-Yassini (1985) while looking at the relationship between the established religion and state argues that it has evolved and works well for the Kingdom without taking much into considerations the condition and willingness of the people. Likewise, Muahmmad al-Atawaneh (2009) concludes that Saudi Arabia is not a theocracy and that the ulema have become part of the state machinery in different roles but fails to take into account the opinion of sections that feel marginalised. On the other hand, scholars such as

Madawi Al-Rasheed (2006; 2010) and Mai Yamani (2004) have been critical of the state and have emphasised on the hegemonic nature of the monarchy without taking into account the efforts being undertaken to develop a working system of governance that is inclusive and responsive to all sections and groups though within the established structures.

Indian scholarly works on Saudi Arabia put the state and the society into 'conservative' category. For example, renowned reformist scholar on Islam, Asghar Ali Engineer in his *The Qur'an, Women, and Modern Society* says, "Even in *conservative* [emphasis added] Saudi society the women are no more prepared to accept their traditional role" (Engineer, 2005: 213). Although, here he is making a point about Saudi women becoming more conscious of their status, he has termed the society as being 'conservative' as a whole which is broad generalisation and is problematic. Nevertheless, Indian scholarship on Saudi Arabia and the Gulf has not completely failed in providing a pragmatic picture about the society and politics. For example, M. H. Ansari (2004) emphasises on the popular urge for change that manifested in 'petition movement' in the aftermath of the Kuwait crisis and argues that it indicates towards the desire for change from within. A. K. Pasha (1999) has discussed the democratic overtures in Saudi Arabia in the context of the struggle between Saud and Faisal in the 1960s and the role of 'free princes' led by Talal, and mentions the movement for political opening and women's rights in the aftermath of the Kuwait crisis which led to the introduction of the Basic Law and institutionalisation of the *Majlis al-Shura* as well as formation of municipal councils. However, he argues that the continuous attempts to overthrow the monarchy have only made it authoritarian in dealing with dissent (Pasha, 1999: 128).

Representations putting societies into binaries tend to forgo the basic idea of a society, which is composed of individuals, with different orientations and understandings of life. Individuals can be receptive of and averse to change despite living together in a given time and place. Like any other society, Saudi Arabia too consists of people who are averse to any change based on various religious, traditional, tribal, economic and political considerations but there is a section which has been receptive of change and has actively pursued reforms (Dekmejian, 2003; Lacroix, 2004; Rapheli, 2005).

Moreover, it is wrong to argue that there has not been any change in the society or the society as a whole is not ready to change or not receptive of any kind of reform. People in Saudi Arabia have experienced numerous changes in their ideas, behaviour and life styles. These changes have come as a result of deliberate reform measures initiated by the monarchy and efforts from reformist sections of the society (Kay, 1982; Niblock, 1982; Sager, 2004; Zuhur, 2005; Alshamsi, 2011; Kéchichian, 2013).

It has also been argued that many reform efforts have been directed at economic modernisation, eradication of poverty, political stability and education and some of the changes that are visible in the society are mere products of changes brought about by these reforms (Aba-Namay, 1993; Champion, 2003; Niblock, 2006; Arkoun, 2006; Al-Eisa, 2009). The Kingdom has witnessed demands for change and reform in various forms particularly in the 1990s, which have attracted mass appeal and forced authorities to respond (Dekmejian, 2003; Lacroix, 2004; Rapheli, 2005). Thus, over a period of time the society, like any other, has evolved and experienced numerous changes. Since the establishment of the Kingdom in 1932, the largely rural-nomadic-tribal community has evolved into an urban-settled-modernised society (Lipsky, 1959; Al-Khateeb, 1982; Fabietti, 1982; Kostiner, 1990). Further, it is not a monolithic and homogenous society as largely understood. Though there are commonalities shared by a vast majority, particularly in the matters of religion, history and Arab ancestry, people have distinguishing practices, beliefs, plurality of heritage, as well as ethnicities (Niblock, 1982; Yamani, 2004; Al-Rasheed, 2006).

Saudi Arabia is undergoing change like any other society and as propounded by Clifford Geertz's anthropology of religion, that religions represent cultural systems, which are both influenced by the process of social change and are themselves able to affect them (Geertz, 1973). Islam as a set of system of belief put forward by Islamic modernists can be employed to understand the process of social change going on in Saudi Arabia. As argued by a number of scholars and articulated by Bassam Tibi that "Islam as a system of cultural symbols with which Muslims perceive reality and evolve their world view" has to be employed for deconstruction of the process of social change in Muslim societies (Tibi, 1990a: 3).

Demography and Social Structure

The evolution of Saudi Arabia from a desert monarchy lacking basic infrastructure and amenities for its largely nomadic farm-based rural population to a modernised oil-based economy by the 1990s had irreversible impacts on its demography and social structure (Fabietti, 1982; Al Hathloul and Edadan, 1991; Kour, 1991). As the formalisation of state structures gained momentum, organisation of life changed to a nearly settled population (Fabietti, 1982). Many nomadic tribes particularly in the Najd region either started to live in settlements to reap the benefits of state policies or were forced to settle down to avoid tribal skirmishes (Al Hathloul and Edadan, 1991; Kour, 1991). This change in demographic character of the population profoundly impacted the society and as a result, the self-sustained nature of tribal life came to an end and interactions between different regions and tribes became frequent and sometime fluid in terms of social interaction and intermixing (Altorki and Cole, 1989).

Oil boom and economic modernisation not only changed the Saudi demographic characteristic from a nomadic to settled life but also brought a large pool of expatriate workers to engage in the oil and oil-driven industries. The Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) countries lacked expertise and human resource to steer economic growth that forced them to bring expatriate human resource, from Arab, Asian and African countries. Scholars observe that international migration was the most significant contributing factor to the growth in urban demography in the GCC countries since the 1970s (Mogadam, 2004; Tabutin and Schoumaker, 2005).

Economic growth is recognised as the most important factor for changing demographic and structural characteristics of Saudi Arabia leading to rapid urbanisation. The transformation from an agriculture and farming-based rural economy to a petroleum-based urban economy fuelled partly by internal migration from rural to urban areas, limited natural resources and lack of economic opportunities became the push factor for rural dwellers while the lure of a better life and economic opportunities in urban areas became the pull factors (Omran and Roudi, 1993). The most important aspect of change in the tribal social organisation was the transformation from a predominantly nomadic to a predominantly settled population (Al-Khateeb, 1981; Fabietti, 1982) and as a result, tribal bonds and belonging became weaker (Samin, 2015).

Demography is an important indicator for socio-economic transition and improvements in key indicators demonstrate an overall progress in the society. It represents aspects such as better economic performance, improved education level, and reduction in poverty (Coale, 1984; Chesnais, 1992) but can have deeper implications such as on questions of identity and changes in values and norms (Bumpass, 1990; Hammel, 1990; Kirk, 1996); for example, rapid urbanisation has affected the tribal and regional identities but consequently helped in emergence of a wider Saudi 'national identity' (Nevo, 1985; Weston, 1987). In addition, the demographic change includes the population burst particularly in the aftermath of the 'baby boom' in the 1970s and 1980s. Thus, the Kingdom has a fairly large youth population and nearly 70 per cent of the Saudis are below 30 years of age (Chabaan, 2009; Murphy, 2011; Thompson, 2014). Moreover, the demographic changes are also visible in terms of internal migrations and rapid urbanisation that have affected many aspects of life including the social structure as well as questions of identities (Al Hathloul and Edadan, 1991; Fuccaro, 2001; Faruqui, 2010).

Saudi society underwent structural transformation due to continuous evolution from a predominantly nomadic and rural community to a predominantly settled and urban society. This has affected the modes of interaction as well as character and nature of relationships between individuals and social institutions such as family, marriage and kinship. New class divisions based on educational, professional and economic conditions have emerged and traditional bases of social organisation such as kinship, ethnicity, tribal linkages and modes of living have undergone transformations (Allman, 1980; Niblock, 1982; Altorki and Cole, 1989; Khoury and Kostiner, 1990; Naumkin, 1995). The structural transformations have affected local communities, identity formation, ethnic and sectarian divisions and social mobility and have resulted in the emergence of middle classes.

Apart from religion and culture, the family in a sense of 'kin group' plays much larger role in the shaping of individual and society and is resilient to external pressure**.** This social structure has deep roots in history and has stood throughout since the pre-Islamic period. With the advent of Islam a new set of companionship was formed that was based in faith and this gave way to the formation of the Islamic community. The

importance of family and religion in the society is thus based in history. The social structure and its importance have remained same despite differences at the level of political structures (Parolin, 2009).

As a result of economic developments and structural changes, class divisions and a new urban middle class emerged (Rugh, 1985). There are debates over the nature and characteristic of this class-based social stratification and a number of scholars argue that the pre-oil Saudi society did not have any significant class divisions (Abir, 1993; Champion, 2003). Those subscribing to this viewpoint suggest that social stratification as understood in terms of class-based divisions in modern societies was not prevalent in the Saudi case before the oil era and even if it was present, its nature was different. There are others who suggest that class divisions existed even before the advent of oil-propelled economic growth and argue that the economic growth merely reinforced existing class-based social divisions (Wenner, 1975; Fandy, 2009; Yizraeli, 2012). Thus the ruling family, tribal leaders, ulema and merchants remained elites, while groups that were traditionally engaged in agriculture, farming and other manual works improved their economic and social status by acquiring education and engaging in businesses and thus formed the newly educated middle class. Those who formed the lower tribes and slaves continued to be in the lower strata of society, including the urban poor (Rugh, 1973; Heller and Safran, 1985; Al-Naqeeb, 1990; Yizraeli, 2012). Changes in demography and social structure have made profound impacts on the family and other social institutions and its role and significance have made deep impacts on various aspects of the social life and the issue has generated internal debate signifying the extent of the change and its impacts (Al-Ghamdi, 1989; Al-Khateeb, 2007; Al-Kharidli, 2008).

Reforms in Saudi Arabia

Saudi society has undergone change and reforms and scholars such as Shirley Kay (1982); Tim Niblock (1982 and 2006), Joseph Kèchichian (2013), Sarah Yizraeli (2012) and Mark Thompson (2011 and 2014) have examined this process of change and evolution from different perspectives and come to explain them in the context of historical and cultural processes. Some scholars have taken a pragmatic view on the society and social change in Saudi Arabia and locate the process within a developmental framework (Niblock, 2006; Kèchichian, 2013; Thompson, 2014). A significant portion

of the literature, however, tries to understand Saudi society as a product of Wahhabi religious reformation, thus ignoring other important factors (Goldrup, 1971; Champion, 2003; Commins, 2006).

The society has witnessed reforms in many areas including education (Bahgat, 1999; Saleh, 1985; Al-Aqil, 2005; Al-Eisa, 2009), condition of women (Ramazani, 1985; Doumato, 1992; Hamdan, 2005; Al-Khateeb, 2007; Le Renard, 2008), functioning of the state and political system (Sager, 2004; Alshamsi, 2011; Stenslie, 2012; Kèchichian, 2013), religious spheres (Algosaibi, 1995; Hertog, 2005; Alhujelan, 2008; Stenslie, 2012), socio-cultural changes (Mordechai, 1993; Al-Khateeb, 2007; Abduh, 2010) and in the area of law and judiciary (Abu Talib, 1984; Aba-Namay, 1993; Al-Darayb, 1999; Vogel, 2000; Kèchichian, 2013). The society has become more amenable to reforms and change since the 1980s and the 1990s and staunch oppositions have come down while demands for reforms have increased. The latter is visible in the new found activities associated with civil society and debates and discussions in the media, though the glass ceiling of no-criticism of the monarchy or al-Saud members and senior ulema continues (Sager, 2004; Alshamsi, 2011; Stenslie, 2012; Kèchichian, 2013).

Scholars articulate two sets of arguments as the causes for reforms. Firstly, it is argued that the change and reforms are a natural outcome of the introduction of modern economic and political apparatus by the monarchy (Niblock, 1982; Hertog, 2007; Hertog, 2009) while another set of scholars attribute it to a forced process of change imposed by the rulers to create a homogenous Saudi identity (Yamani, 2004; Al-Rasheed, 2006). It has also been argued that the Muslim societies, including Saudi Arabia, are going through a transition due to tension between traditional and modernising influences (Niblock, 1982; Kèchichian, 1986; Nevo, 1988; Okruhlik, 2004). According to some scholars, the social reforms in Saudi Arabia is driven by the emergence of a 'new middle class' comprising managers, administrators, technicians, clerks, teachers, lawyers, scientists, military officials, traders and merchants. They became the main constituency of the monarchy with the emergence of a modernised Kingdom after World War II and grew rapidly with the infusion of huge oil wealth (Rugh, 1973). The accelerated pace of material growth and sustained influx of human

resources, together with their own culture and ideas, has created the ground for change in the socio-economic behaviour of the indigenous population (Ibrahim, 1982).

The reforms on the one hand have been catalysed by the influx of foreign culture and ideas due to increased oil wealth and business activities while on the other hand the imposition of one culture on the entire population to create a homogenous society and to establish one Saudi identity has produced forced change in the lives of people. The society has witnessed changes due to the influence of 'Najdi-Wahhabi' understanding of Islam and its imposition on the rest of the groups like Hejazis, Yemenis and Shias after the formation of the unified Kingdom. This phenomenon of forcible imposition of one cultural identity has also divided the society into regional and tribal identities (Nevo, 1998; Yamani, 2004).

Secondly, it has been articulated that different societies have different yardsticks for change and the Saudi society is going through a phase of transition whereby the masses, particularly the youth, have been continuously engaged in debates about the state, politics and society (Al-Rasheed, 2006). It has also been argued that the general perception of Saudis as very conservative people may not be true particularly when it comes to the desire for social reform. In comparison to other Islamic countries the people in Saudi Arabia are no more conservative with respect to the issues of religion, gender and politics (Moaddel, 2006).

A society that experiences change undergoes a situation whereby the individual's psyche oscillates between traditions and modernity (Stoakes, 1972). This tension among individuals in Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries can be found particularly in the aftermath of the Kuwait Crisis. Even though it was not a new phenomenon, the evolving socio-political condition intensified this struggle at the individual and societal level (Foley, 2011). This intensity in the process of social reform can be attributed to various factors including globalisation, political events in the country, region and the world as well as the changing social structure in the country and spread of modern education (Raphaeli, 2005; Al-Naqib, 2008).

One of the most important features of social reform is the emergence of civil society and voluntary sectors in Saudi Arabia, particularly during the past two decades. There

is, however, a general lack of understanding at the international level about the traditional charitable organisations and their modern *avatars* which are working in different sectors of the Saudi society. Non-Government organisations, charitable sectors and associations have been the primary agents for socio-political dialogue and social reform and are trying to create some awareness among the people regarding different issues and affairs of the state and society. In this process these voluntary sector organisations provide an essential bridge for dialogue between the monarchy and the people. They may not have been the harbinger of political change but play a key role in the process of social reform (Ibrahim, 2007; Montagu, 2010).

Some scholars argue that reforms in Saudi Arabia are a societal and logical necessity which the authorities are aware of and are doing their bit to promote in all aspects of life including society, economy, politics and administration (Sager, 2004). The realisation on part of the monarchy on the need to promote social reforms has come more because of the spate of violence inside the Kingdom that followed the 11 September attacks. To galvanize the process of reform the monarchy has consciously encouraged debate and dialogue among different sections on various issues including Islam and status of women (Raphaeli, 2005; Moaddel, 2006; Le Renard, 2008).

During the 1990s and in the aftermath of the 11 September attacks, Saudi Arabia witnessed demands for reform from various quarters. The ‘petition movement’ led by both the liberal elements as well as the religious sections opposing the policies on different matters engulfed the monarchy and some of the long pending demands for political reforms were met by the King. Later, at the turn of century and against the backdrop of domestic, regional and international events, the petition fervour caught the imagination of people who wanted reform. This phenomenon has given rise to a kind of opposition within the prevailing socio-political structure that has since been divided between those who demand reforms for modernisation and others who seek a return to traditions and more ‘religionisation’ (Al-Rasheed, 1996; Ansari, 2004; Dekmejian, 2003; Lacroix, 2004; Yamani, 2004).

Status of Women

The discourse on gender and women acquires a large proportion of literature on Islam and Muslim World. A number of scholars have suggested an inherent and inbuilt gender-based discrimination, which is manifested in the strict subjugation of the women. It has been argued that this practice is prevalent largely in the entire Muslim world and it is not without basis. Two sets of arguments in this respect have been articulated; one that bases this discrimination on tradition, history and culture and other which points Islam as the basis of this practice. While another set of scholar contest the notion of disadvantaged, subservient, powerless position of Muslim women as baseless and not based on correct understanding of the Islamic societies and point that the continued subservience of women has been due to manipulated interpretation of religious text by the patriarchal ulema (Mernissi, 1991; Mernissi, 2011; Altorki, 1977; Caesar, 1984; Ramazani, 1985; Yamani, 1996; AlMunajjed, 1997).

However, the literature on gender discourse and status of women in contemporary Saudi Arabia is far and few. The available literature suggests that segregation of sexes is the way of life and women are completely segregated in public. In private, they may intermingle with men from family and friends but the state does not allow intermixing of sexes in any other circumstances. Female professionals, particularly in the field of medicine and health and businesswomen may sometimes mix with men due to work-related compulsions but they must adhere to the dress code prescribed by the state. The men control almost all facets of life of women except finances and individual relations with other women. Segregation of women in traditional family rituals like those attached to child birth have been reinforced particularly as fear of Western influence became more pronounced after the stationing of the US forces during the Kuwait crisis (Caesar, 1984; Doumato, 1992; Yamani, 2004; Ahmed, 2008).

Some scholars, on the contrary, argue that the gender discrimination prevalent in the Saudi society may not be understood completely through traditions and conventions. It is the dominant discourses together with laws, measures, and policies that have served to perpetuate and consolidate sexual segregation. This institutionalisation has served the monarchy in enhancing its legitimacy by showing its commitment towards the

principles of Islam and traditions on the one hand and towards development and modernisation on the other (Le Renard, 2008).

Some of the studies highlight that since the start of the female education in the 1960s, Saudi women have gained some rights. A large number of women can be found working in different sectors particularly as teachers and in the field of medicine. However, off-late women can be increasingly found in other non-traditional fields including administration, business, sports etc. thereby precipitating a clash between ancient traditions and modern values. The educated-working women can be found to be living in two separate worlds simultaneously; that of a professional and contributing member of society and a protected, veiled woman bound by traditions (Ramazani, 1985; AlMunajjed, 1997).

A number of studies highlight the change in the attitude of people with respect to women and gender discrimination, which is gaining acceptance. Since the 1990s, more women have tried to assert their rights and have demanded an end to discriminations. This change in attitude, however, cannot be disassociated from the larger discourses on politics, culture and society that are sharply divided in favour of and against the need for reforms. This has nonetheless benefitted the cause of Saudi women who have improved their conditions and have also generated a debate on their role and status (Moaddel, 1998; Vidyasagar and Rea, 2004; Yamani, 2004).

Education is one field where the women have gained significantly and they outnumber men in university enrolment and outperform them in higher education. The ratio of literate women to men has considerably increased and the ratio of girls to boys in primary, secondary and higher education has also improved. The ratio of women in workforce and among those going abroad for higher education has witnessed improvements (MoEP and UNDP, 2009; MHE, 2010a) but the role of women in the economy remains limited due to cultural limitations (Maestri, 2011).

The daily struggle of a Saudi woman runs deep in the system and is entangled in the socio-cultural history of the Kingdom (Doumato, 1992; Doumato, 1999; Moghadam, 2003; Nashat and Tucker, 1999; Al-Rasheed, 2013). The representation of women in the judiciary, media, sports, economy, and business is low and until 2013 nomination of

female members in the *Majlis al-Shura* and the 2015 municipal elections, their political participation was unimaginable. Female participation in civil society and public affairs is negligible as the closed Saudi system does not allow much scope even for a male-dominated civil society (Montagu, 2010). Accessibility to education for women has a profound impact upon their social conditions (Bahry, 1982; Jamal, 1988; Al Rawaf and Simmons, 1991; Zaidan, 2000; Hamdan, 2005; AlMunajjed, 2009). This is reflected in the increasing visibility of women in media and public sphere and articulations of their needs and rights (Sakr, 2008; Al Sadiq and Hausheer, 2014). On the other hand, this trend has not diminished or ended practices that hinder women's participation as their legal status, gender-segregation, movement restrictions and so on continue (Doumato, 1999; Baki, 2004; Al-Rasheed, 2013). This discriminatory nature, which excludes women, has prevented realisation of their potential in attaining larger social, economic and political responsibilities (Doumato, 1999; Baki, 2004). Saudi women deal with an inherent dichotomy and struggle to manage tradition and modernity.

From the literature survey it is obvious that most scholars see the changes in the Saudi society a result of its interaction with the outside world and due to pressure from outside. However, as one looks into the debates inside the Kingdom and goes into the Arabic literature and Saudi scholarship, it becomes clearer that the picture is largely blurred. The society has witnessed significant changes since the beginning of the commercial production of oil, followed by economic developments. This has contributed to the social change and galvanised by regional and international events created demands for reforms. The society has been witness to further changes and reforms since the 1990s but a comprehensive and structured study of these changes within a conceptual framework of the interplay of Islam, tradition and modernisation has not been done. Moreover, effort has not been made to understand the significance of internal reformist elements and how the society negotiates a restrictive religious, cultural and political atmosphere to harbour reforms and change. It is this gap in the literature that the research focuses on.

Definition, Rationale and Scope

Against the backdrop of the literature examined in the preceding section, the research analyses and examines the changes and reforms in Saudi society between the period marked by two historical events, that is, Kuwait crisis (1990-91) and Arab Spring (2010-11). The Kuwait Crisis was the precursor for movements across the Gulf and especially Saudi Arabia for major reform initiatives. This demand initially manifested in the 'petition movement' which was patronised by the monarchy and subsequently, measures were taken to meet some of these demands. Though these were not profound, they emboldened sections of the society who started demanding more reforms and some Saudi Islamists and 'liberals' even spearheaded an opposition movement against the monarchy. The monarchy responded with coercion, arrests and incarceration of these leaders leading to fizzling out of the movement. The 11 September attacks increased external pressures and internal demands for reforms and the monarchy responded with another set of measures to assuage the situation. At the same time, it faced opposition to the reform measures from majority of ulema who advocated strict adherence to Wahhabi Islam. By the time Arab Spring started in late 2010, the monarchy had largely balanced reforms between demands of the 'liberals' and opposition from 'Islamists' and had even played one against other to retain a firm control. This had slowed down the reforms and the regime had started to take strict action against those leading the demands for human rights, political participation and so on. Thus, the period between 1990 and 2010 provide a broad canvass to examine changes in the Saudi society.

The research analyses major changes in the Saudi society and how they affect people's daily life. To understand these things, the research has taken four variables, namely demography, social structure, status of women and religion and ulema. In order to understand the role of internal elements the research has divided them into three important actors who have been at the forefront of bringing these reforms: the state or the monarchy (which balances between pro- and anti-reforms sections), the emerging middle classes and 'liberal' and 'reformist' intellectuals (which demand and support reforms) and ulema (that largely oppose reforms). The socio-cultural climate in Saudi Arabia has experienced changes during the past two decades which is manifested in the changing attitude of the population towards religion, tradition, cultural practices and

status of women. The monarchy, emerging civil society, religious establishment and people themselves contribute to this reform process and it is the direction of the social reforms that is the focus of this thesis.

The Islamic world at large, Saudi Arabia in particular, is going through a phase of change that is manifested in a kind of struggle between tradition and modern thoughts and ideas. This struggle manifests between the desire to benefit from scientific and technological advancements and acquire a 'modern' approach to life on the one hand, and a longing for keeping traditions and beliefs intact on the other. This tension between the two contradictory wishes has created a cultural mosaic which has been witnessed in all aspects of Saudi life. The Kingdom is not just an important country strategically due to its geopolitical location and oil reserves but also due to its centrality to the Islamic world, which has significant cultural and religious influence in the Islamic world, which adds to the significance of the research.

Islamic modernism that emerged in the late 19th century and the early 20th century as the Muslim world came in contact with the West is one of the most debated thought in Islamic theological discourses. It would be important to study this process of change going on in Saudi Arabia within an Islamic modernist framework. The process of socio-cultural change in Saudi Arabia has been witnessed for a long time, but the society by and large has remained traditional in its approach and world views or has not accepted the process of 'modernisation' wholeheartedly. This dichotomy in the society has been debated but a comprehensive study is required to understand the entire phenomenon. The scope of this research lies in the fact that the study of social reform process in Saudi Arabia would add to the existing scholarship on the Saudi society with a people-centric approach. It will also give impetus to further research in the field of Islamic societies at large. It would help in deconstructing the socio-cultural environment that shapes the different aspects of life in Saudi Arabia as well as the role of Saudi monarchy in galvanising the process of social reform.

Research Questions

1. What are the social reform measures taken by Saudi Arabia and what are their objectives and impacts?
2. To what extent the social reform process has been influenced by structural and demographic changes?
3. What has been the role of the external factors in influencing reforms in Saudi Arabia?
4. What are the influences of ulema upon the Saudi social structure and what is their role in the social reforms?
5. To what extent have the socio-cultural and religious reforms helped in bridging the gender divide in Saudi society?

Hypotheses

1. The Saudi society is changing more due to increased urge from internal reformist elements than its interaction with the outside world.
2. Despite Saudi Arabia being a highly religious society, the people's perception towards religion is undergoing a change.
3. Women in Saudi Arabia have achieved gains in different fields but face challenges because of the ulema.

Research Methodology

The Saudi society is experiencing reform driven by the efforts from the monarchy and demands by 'liberal' and 'reformist' sections of the society, especially since the early 1990s leading to significant social change. This change and reform processes could be examined within the context of the 'liberal-democratic' ideals of social reform, which highlights the progress of a society due to local socio-political and economic factors defined within the framework of modernisation theory. However, the general perspective of modernisation that presumes societies as instances of a universal process of secularisation and value generalisation may not be applicable to the Saudi society because of its unique socio-cultural heritage and the historical processes of change it has experienced. Likewise, the thesis that people's culture is shaped by their society's location in the world order and the world economic system cannot be completely

applicable in the Saudi case even though its economy is intertwined with the global economic system and being a rentier economy the sudden and unprecedented affluence it experienced has created many social problems. Based on this assumption the research seeks to examine the changes in Saudi society from a perspective that keeps the unique reform trajectory experienced in the Kingdom. Therefore, Islamic modernism that advocates a gradual social, political and economic transformation within the framework of Islam, tradition and modernisation has been chosen as the conceptual framework.

The proposed hypotheses were tested and validated based on field work, personal observations, interviews with Saudis, both scholars and common people, Saudi government reports and policy documents, royal decrees, *fatwas* by Saudi ulema, interactions with Indian academics specialising Gulf society and politics and diplomats who served in the Kingdom, reports by international organisations including the United Nations, World Bank, reports by international think tanks and advocacy organisations such as International Crisis Group and Human Rights Watch and a large collection of other secondary work.

The three-month field work between 14 November 2014 and 9 February 2015 in Saudi Arabia was a crucial phase in the research that not only helped in collecting primary and secondary sources in Arabic and English but also led to extensive consultations with Saudi experts including officials, academics, journalists, researchers, students and common Saudis. Personal observations and discussions with Saudis across spectrum of opinions and from different walks of life were significant in understanding the finer nuances and subtle variations in opinion and worldviews about the subject matter. How Saudis look at the idea of reforms and changes and how these create tensions in the society were revelations that could not have been adequately understood without a field work. Personal observations during the field work meant travels and spending time in public places like mosques, parks, malls, traditional markets etc. in different Saudi cities. It included private interactions with Saudis, largely men but also a few women, and visits to private meetings, religious congregations and parties.

During the field work, as much as 30 personal interviews were conducted and the interviewees were not chosen on the basis of a predetermined list, rather it was more of

a result of making personal contacts, largely through increasing network. Choosing interviewees was not possible in a place where it is difficult to gain confidence of the local population and people remain hesitant to talk to strangers, especially when it comes to sensitive issues such as religion and women. At the same time, as a matter of precaution, the interviewees were not asked a predetermined set of questions and were probed with questions only about areas which they were comfortable with and were willing to discuss. The interviewees included people from various walks of life including a member of the sixth *Majlis al-Shura*, three government officials, four researchers in think tanks and universities, many professionals including two women, students, academics, journalists and artists and Middle East experts. Most of the interviewees barring three were unwilling to be quoted or named and thus to protect the identity they have not been directly named in the research and interviews have been cited as part of the field work and listed as such in the references section. None of the interviews were electronically recorded and in most cases only partial notes were taken during discussions but detailed notes were made immediately after the interviews were over.

In addition to the personal interviews, some of the religious sermons that included important reference to the society and aspects relevant for the research were attended. Two local *majalis*[2] (evening sittings) were attended. First was a weekly meeting hosted by a famous literary figure in Jeddah where participants included local public officials, media persons and social activists and second hosted by a local religious figure in Dammam where participants were predominantly youth seeking guidance and clarification on various religious issues. The first was hosted in a private house and did not include women while the second was organised at the office of a registered religious society and had separate arrangement for female participants. These gave insights into the way people discuss about issues of socio-political significance and the way traditional methods of consultations and discussions have provided means for the people to express their views. Even though direct criticism of the ruling dispensation is avoided, local administration comes for scathing scrutiny during such meetings. The

[2] Also known by the Persian term *diwaniya* in parts of the Gulf, particularly in the coastal regions where trading with Iran was frequent. In the central region the Arabic term *majlis* is in vogue.

field work included travel to various parts of the Kingdom to conduct interviews including in the central region of Najd, the south-western region of Hejaz and the Shia majority-Eastern Province. Places that were visited for interviews or library consultations included Riyadh, Kharj, Jeddah, Mecca, Medina, Dammam, Dhahran, Khobar and Hasa.

Documents and reports by Saudi ministries of social affairs, Islamic affairs, education and UNICEF, UNESCO, UNDESA etc were analysed. Secondary literature included works in Arabic and English by past and contemporary scholars and Arabic language sources available in various libraries across the Kingdom. Secondary sources also included media reports, commentaries and editorials published largely from Saudi Arabia both in English and Arabic and also some pan-Arab and global media news websites.

Limitations

The research has some limitations which need to be pronounced; the most important being that is not a study of specific reform measures taken during the period under research rather it takes a holistic view of the society and within that tries to understand the change and reform processes. It does not provide a list of reform measures in specific areas rather reform measures in specific areas have been discussed within respective sections. Education reforms which is an important area of change is not discussed as a distinct variable and has been discussed as part of change in other areas such as improving education opportunities for women and changing attitude towards religious education. Similarly, it does not try to find reforms in the area of religion, rather sees changes in people's attitude and behaviour towards religion as a larger process of cultural change. The research does not quantify the changes and reform initiatives and rather takes a qualitative approach towards the process of reforms within the larger process of social change. Though the research has largely relied on primary research to understand the phenomenon of change and reforms, secondary sources have also been consulted to support the arguments and test the hypotheses.

Some limitations in terms of the field work, interviews and consultation should be noted. Firstly, personal interactions with Saudis included only five women and among

them two remained veiled throughout the meeting. Given the cultural constraints, it was difficult to individually meet and interview more women and a couple of women who agreed to be interviewed preferred e-mail interviews over personal interactions. A couple of women who agreed to meet never turned up for the meeting. Thus, only a limited insight by Saudi women is included in the thesis. Nevertheless, personal observation in public places gave an idea about the way women organise their lives and how despite constraints, women are increasingly becoming part of public life through education, economic participation and social and cultural activities. Secondly, interactions with the ulema were limited and only a few non-official ulema could be personally consulted. None of the official religious figures could be interviewed and only during one of the religious congregations that some personal interactions were possible.

An important aspect of the limitation is the dependence on Islamic modernism as a conceptual framework for the study. There is no doubt that Islamic modernist ideal of gradual reforms encompassing ideals of Islam, tradition and modernisation provides the best framework. At the same time, there is no socio-political discourse or tradition within Saudi Arabia that can be described or recognised as 'Islamic modernism'.

Note on terminologies

Simplified transliteration for Arabic words has been used and any standard style of transliteration has been avoided for two reasons: a) because of vowel and notation marks that require special characters is difficult to master, and b) it would have complicated the pronunciation for non-Arabic readers defeating the purpose for transliteration. All Arabic words and terms are italicised except those which are in common use in English such as ulema. Proper nouns except name of persons are in italics with first alphabet in capital such as *Majlis al-Shura*. Some of the terminologies such as 'modern', 'modernity', 'modernisation', 'progress', and 'progressive', as explained in the earlier sections and hence are marked with single quotes to signify their specific use.

Chapterisation

The thesis is divided into eight chapters including introduction and conclusion. The six substantial chapters focus on conceptual framework, historical background, demography, social structure, status of women and role of religion and ulema.

In the second chapter on **Conceptual Framework**, it is proposed that the process of change and reforms in Saudi Arabia should be understood in the context of three important components of the Saudi society, that is, Islam, tradition and modernisation. Existing frameworks explaining changes and reforms in Muslim, Arab and Gulf societies, such as 'theocratic monarchy', 'patrimonial state', 'rentier social contract', 'neo-patriarchy' and 'new Arab social order', have been examined arguing that they do not satisfactorily explain the changes and reforms in Saudi Arabia. The chapter discusses Wahhabi Islam underlining its socio-political dominance and highlights the significance of social traditions in individual and collective lives. Further, the idea of modernisation and its importance is discussed. The idea of Islamic modernism that possesses elements of the three notions—Islam, tradition and modernity—are explained raising a question whether the ideas propounded by Islamic modernist scholars can help explain the process of change and reforms in Saudi society.

This is followed by **Historical Background**, which discusses political evolution and economic growth story of the Kingdom contextualising contemporary Saudi society to its historical evolution. The chapter discusses the landmark events in modern Saudi history such as the beginning of commercial production of oil, struggle for power between Saud and Faisal, siege of Kaaba, and Kuwait crisis that made deep impacts on the state and society.

Fourth chapter on **Demography: Changes and Challenges** examines the rise in national population and improvements in demographic indicators such as fertility and mortality. It delves into aspects of demographic change in terms of the growth in middle classes and how this has impacted the society and created demands for change from within. The educated middle class and reformist intellectuals have been at the forefront of demanding reforms and the monarchy has responded by taking measures such as providing education, healthcare and more recently the demands for better job

opportunities for educated women. The chapter examines issues of marginalised group and how demographic changes, urbanisation and internal migration have created a section of urban poor who are marginalised as well as those who have been traditionally marginalised such as Shias, a group that continues to remain at the margins despite some efforts to providing better educational, healthcare and economic opportunities. The chapter uses figures and data from Saudi government and international sources to gauge trends in urbanisation, migration and how this demographic change has posed numerous socio-political challenges to the state and society.

In chapter five on **Social Structural: Family, Tribe and the Society** the changes in social structure is examined explaining the factors responsible for transformations despite retaining basic characteristics. It discusses the tribal social organisation, which has become predominantly settled and urbanised from a Bedouin nomadic or village-based life style. Tribes remain an important component of individual and collective identity but its significance in social life has weakened due to urbanisation and other challenges thrown up due to economic modernisation and increasing impacts of globalisation. The chapter delves upon the breaking down of tribal social organisation and emergence of the new class-based social divisions. Class and tribal identities though have not been broken rather have been strengthened, thus the traditionally dominant tribes have become richer forming the upper classes, while less dominant tribes have remained marginal but have nevertheless benefited from economic growth and public education to secure a better standard of life. Social institutions such as family, marriage and kinship and the changing nature of these institutions leading to changes in individual and collective behaviour and emerging ways of social interactions and its impacts are also examined.

The following chapter on **Status of Women** deals with an important aspect of Saudi social life. Problems facing Saudi women and improvements in their conditions are discussed in detail. It also examines the reform initiatives in areas such as education, employment, family status and healthcare that have led to improvements in condition of women and looks into the role of media and civil society in promoting the idea of women's rights. Areas such as arts, fashion and design industries are examined to understand the role of women outside the home and beyond family affairs. Further, the

chapter analyses continued discriminations faced by Saudi women in spheres including politics, judiciary, religion, sports and other problems they face on an everyday basis. It looks into the specific problems of domestic violence, polygamy and sexual abuse which are rampant and affect the Saudi women. The chapter underlines the gendered discourse on women in Saudi Arabia and highlights that despite some improvements, gender roles are very sharply divided and debates confine to providing more rights to women in a society that is afflicted with inherent gender discriminations.

The seventh chapter on titled **Role of Religion and Ulema** discusses the significance of Islam in the society and analyses the role of ulema as an interlocutor between the state and society. It argues that the role of religion and ulema are entrenched in the society and that the ulema not only have a stake in the state but have a strong social influence. They continue to be revered for religious knowledge and Wahhabism remains important as religious movement and political ideology. The chapter looks into the aspects such as the role of *fatwas* and the process of *ifta'* and role of mosques and religious congregations for *dars* (study) and *dawah* (preaching). The intractable influence of ulema in the judiciary and the significance of Hajj and Islamic endowments (*waqf*) in the society are also examined. It provides insights into the divisions among the ulema based on political ideology, religious, sectarian affiliations and due to exposure to new ideas. It further sheds light on the changing perception of religion among the youth through discussions on popular culture including music, arts and literature, spread of liberal ideas and youth and religion. The chapter argues that though social change impacted the role and importance of ulema, they continue to wield strong influence and a major force against reforms.

The final chapter—**Conclusion**—tests the hypotheses and summarises the findings.

Chapter Two

Conceptual Framework

The process of reforms and change in Saudi Arabia should be understood within the context of evolution of 'modern' Gulf, Arab and Muslim societies (Rahman, 1966; Sharabi, 1988; Hashemi, 2009). This is important because it has followed a similar trajectory and timeline in the process of change. It was the declining influence of the Ottoman Empire and increasing penetration of the West into the Arab world that triggered the process of self-reflection and desire for 'modernisation' in the 19th century. The process also followed realignments in terms of regional geopolitics leading to disintegration of the Ottoman Empire, formation of new states and emergence of national consciousness, first as a 'supra-national' Arab nationalism and subsequently 'sub-national' regional, ethnic and sectarian nationalisms such as Turkish, Kurdish, Syrian, Iraqi etc. In the Saudi context, though the evolution of the state followed a different trajectory, the nature of the state and society was not different from the other new states in the region. Another defining factor was the way in which a tribal chieftaincy used a religious reform movement to establish its authority and forming a state (Kostiner, 1990; Khoury, 1993; Al-Rasheed, 2002; Champion, 2003). Once the new state was established, its rulers – King Abdulaziz bin Abdulrahman al-Saud (Ibn Saud) and his successors – followed a model of 'modernisation', which is defined as a 'growth oriented development' model (Birks and Sinclair, 1982; El Azhary, 1984).

The 'modernisation' project gripped most of the post-colonial Arab-Muslim societies due to the recognition on part of the states and their rulers that it is the only way forward towards progress and alleviation of the prevailing 'backwardness' (Rahman, 1970). Economic development and industrialisation were considered the only means towards redemption and Saudi Arabia also followed a similar trajectory. The oil-generated wealth made it easier for the Kingdom to execute its 'modernisation' project and maintain stability. This was not the case with many others, especially those with

scarce resources who faced extreme hardships, instabilities and continuous political schisms (Mamdani, 1996).

Perpetual political instabilities together with failures to satisfy the intended goals of 'modernisation', especially economic development led to criticism of 'modernisation' being a 'progressive' project (Apter, 1987; Ibrahim, 1982). It was termed as devoid of the right ingredients to create stable and peaceful society rather creating exclusive societies filled with class divisions, religious intolerance, authoritarian states and social disharmony (Ibrahim, 1982: 173-174). The critics articulated the need for a 'post-modern' approach that does not impose a set of ideas and actions rather encourages local ways towards 'progress'. In this context, scholars articulate that Muslim societies cannot be detached from Islam and local traditions in their aspirations towards progress and modernisation (Rahman, 1970; Sardar, 1977; Saeed, 1994; Moaddel, 2005; and Tibi, 2009). It is argued that the pace of development and change in these societies have been slow and arduous because of the confusion between the necessity for retaining Islam in the socio-political and economic set up and the need to adopt 'modernity'.

Studies on contemporary Gulf societies have proposed numerous frameworks such as theocratic monarchy (Bligh, 1985; Layish, 1987), patrimonial theocracy (Al-Yassini, 1985), neo-patriarchy (Sharabi, 1988), rentier social contract (Beblawi, 1990; Bronson, 2006; Jones, 2010) and the 'new social order' (Ibrahim, 1982) to understand the process of change. On the other hand, a few studies have attempted to understand these societies within the framework of neo-liberal and post-modernist perspectives (Abir, 1993; Fandy, 2009). Another set of studies suggest cultural resistance towards 'modernisation' as a framework to understand some of the developments in these societies (Al-Naqeeb, 1990; Algosaibi, 1995).

The idea that Saudi Arabia is a theocracy based in the patrimonial social structure emanates from political evolution of the Kingdom rooted in the 18th century religious reform movement (Wahhabism) and the coming into power of a family that appropriated the state structures to extend its authority in the name of upholding 'pure' Islam (Al-Yassini, 1985: 35-37). Nevertheless, it depended more on the local tribal socio-political structures to strengthen its rule and create the facade of economic

modernisation and oil-based social welfare, which is defined as rentier social contract between the ruler and the ruled (Beblawi, 1990; Herb, 1999; Bronson, 2006). Alternatively, the reinforcement of the traditional gendered social structure in the name of modernisation and development is defined as neo-patriarchy (Sharabi, 1988).

Such frameworks, however, fall short of explaining the reform process in contemporary Saudi Arabia as they only emphasise on some specific aspects. They either explain the evolution of the state structure in terms of the tribal nature of the society and the internalisation of Wahhabi Islam by the ruling dispensation or delve into the impact of oil-generated affluence used by the state to buy loyalty of the 'subject'. Some explain the social disharmony and religious intolerance in terms of cultural resistance towards 'modernisation' but fail to account for the appropriation of power by the elites. In other words, these frameworks fail to give a comprehensive idea about the process of social change undergoing the Kingdom because of a lack of adequate recognition of one of the three important variables, namely Islam, 'tradition' and 'modernisation' that according to this thesis have juxtaposed to create the processes of change in Saudi Arabia. While recognising the significance of these frameworks, this chapter challenges the notions that the transformations in contemporary Saudi Arabia can be understood without a complete appreciation of these three variables.

The chapter articulates that the constant intermingling of Islam, local traditions and modernisation, conditioned within the limits defined by the al-Saud, has catalysed socio-political developments in contemporary Saudi Arabia, and hence the process of social change and reforms should be examined within this conceptual framework. It is divided into four sections; the first discusses Islam, more specifically Wahhabi Islam, because of its importance in the Saudi context. The next section delves into the concepts of 'tradition' and 'modernity' and the ways in which they juxtapose with local Islam to catalyse the social reforms process. The discussion then moves to Islamic modernism problematising the concept as an alternative to contextualise developments in Saudi society. The fourth section discusses the developments in contemporary Saudi Arabia raising the question whether Islamic modernism can provide a framework to examine the change and reforms in the Saudi context.

Wahhabi Islam

Islam is not merely a set of faith that provides theological answers to questions on life and death rather is part of the cultural heritage impacting daily lives of millions of believers. It has impacted their social behaviour for centuries and continues to do so. Since Wahhabi Islam is the dominant trend in contemporary Saudi Arabia, it is important to understand the concepts and ideas associated with it and its criticisms. When Muhammad bin Abdul Wahhab (1703-1792) set out his agenda to practice and proselytise 'pristine' Islam based on the idea of adhering to *al-Salaf al-Saleh*[1] (hereafter *salaf*), he would not have imagined that his teachings will continue to create ripples in Muslim societies two hundred years later or would be held responsible for creating a violent global violent *jihadi* trend in Islam (Algar, 2002; Commins, 2006). He had a simplistic solution for the 'ills' facing Islam and Muslims of his time and wanted to create a 'pious' Islamic state that would fulfil the task of practising and proselytising 'pristine' faith cleaned of all 'wrong' and 'ignorant' practices that Muslims have acquired due to their interactions with non-Muslims (Wahhab, 1974; Wahhab, 1986). His readings on Islamic traditions and jurisprudence were limited to interpretations of Ibn Taymiyyah (1263-1328), which he wanted the society to follow in letter and spirit. His early attempts met with resistance (Traboulsi, 2002; Crawford, 2011) but an alliance with the *Emir* of Dariyah,[2] Muhammad bin Saud, proved successful and hence the foundations of the Saudi-Wahhabi state was laid in 1744. The rest, as they say, is history; Wahhabism emerged as a major trend in Islam and developed into a political ideology and religious 'cult' or 'sect' (Delong-Bas, 2004; Demant, 2006).

Wahhabism is rather simplistic in its approach towards religion and humanity and abhors plurality. It emphasises universality of faith and ritual practices and rejects the historical evolution of Islamic philosophy, culture and practices. Khaled Abou El Fadl, a Kuwaiti scholar of Islamic law, opines: "This [Wahhabi] approach, besides being

[1] The term *al-Salaf al-Saleh* meaning 'the pious predecessors' vaguely refers to the first three generations of Muslims who had either direct exposure to Prophet Muhammad and his teachings, or his immediate followers (*sahaba*) or their followers (*taba'in*) or their followers (*taba' taba'in*).

[2] A small agricultural township in Najd, some 25 km northwest of the current Saudi capital city of Riyadh that became the seat of power for the first Saudi state (1744-1818).

ahistorical, proved to be hopelessly simplistic and naive—it was impossible to return to Qur'an and *Sunnah* in a vacuum" (El Fadl, 2001a: 174). At another occasion, he observes that "Wahhabism resisted the indeterminacy of the modern age by escaping to a strict literalism in which the text became the sole source of legitimacy" (El Fadl, 2001b: 32). Hence various scholars argue that the Wahhabi reform movement did not emerge due to concerns for developing the existing heritage of Islamic thought and jurisprudence (Algar, 2002), rather it was a reactionary movement concerned only with ritual practices (Laoust, 1965). The Wahhabi interpretation called for a revival of early Islam based on a literalist reading of Islamic sacred scriptures, Quran and Hadith, hence ignoring historical development of *fiqh* and later progresses in Islamic theology and philosophy (Mousalli, 2001, 2007).

The most important aspect of Wahhabism pertains to faith; the idea of *tawheed* (unity of God) is emphasised as the basis of Islam and any deviation in its philosophy is regarded as *bid'ah* (innovation) (Lauzière, 2010; Firro, 2013). Wahhab's most famous written work *Kitab al-Tawheed* (*The Book of Unity*) articulated the need for ridding Muslims of *shirk*[3] and concludes that the most important reason for decline among Muslim societies was dilution of the basic tenet of monotheism (Wahhab, 1986). Therefore, an emphasis on *tawheed* became an integral part of Wahhabism. The idea was borrowed from earlier scholarly works, such as of Ahmad ibn Hanbal (780-855) and Ibn Taymiyyah, who argued that the relation between human and God is of complete surrendering and total obedience without any intermediary (Haj, 2009). He stressed that

> ....intrinsic to the concepts of submission and worship is the execution of God's moral commands, which are relational, embedded in social structures and embodied in daily social interactions. In making this argument, ibn 'Abdul Wahhab wants to demonstrate to members of his community that the worship of gravestones and saints is unauthorized because it betrays the Islamic notion of tawhid as explained in the Qur'an and the Sunna (ibid: 43).

The other important notion adopted in Wahhabi Islam is the denial of *taqlid* (following one of the four established schools in Sunni Islam, namely Hanafi, Shafi'i, Hanbali and Maliki) (Wahhab, 1974). This again was based on the works of Ibn Hanbal and Ibn Taymiyyah who had articulated the need to shed *taqlid* and stand with the *salaf* in daily

[3] Practice of associating Godly/supernatural powers to humans or other beings or things including worshipping grave, calling for the dead to mediate with the Divine power.

practices of the faith. Thus, it is argued that Wahhabism is "a modern interpretation of the Salafi Islam as interpreted by eminent medieval scholars such as Ibn Hanbal, Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah" (Mousalli, 2007: 441). The idea had gained popularity among ulema in early Islam to gain credibility in the context of numerous competing ideologies (Ansari, 1972: 262). Based on this idea, Wahhabi Islam opines that it is important to go back to the fundamentals – the Quran and the Sunnah – in order to rid Muslim societies of it ills (Lewis, 2007).

Wahhab further linked the idea of faith with practice, and argued that Islam emphasises on belief as well as practice as mere belief without correct adherence of the prescribed practices would not lead to heaven in the afterlife.[4] This was an orthodox interpretation which had witnessed developments and numerous interpretations about philosophy of monotheism and plurality in practice, hence Wahhabi thought negated the evolution made in Islamic philosophy and practices (Mousalli, 2007). In addition, the idea of *tajdid* (revival) and *islah* (reform) was propounded and Wahhab looked at himself as a *mujaddid* (revivalist) and *muslih* (reformer). The idea has a strong tradition in Islamic scholarship whereby it is argued that in every age God sends scholars who revive and reform the religion (Tayob, 2014). Thus, it became his duty to prevent the ongoing decline of Muslim *umma* by finding the cause and prescribe the treatment for *fasad* (degeneration), and he sought to go back to the fundamentals "moving away from centuries of historical interpretations", in favour of direct consultation and interpretation of the holy texts (Haj, 2009: 35).

While suggesting the need to go back to fundamentals, Wahhab claimed that those who do not follow the way Islam is understood by him are not 'true' Muslims, that their faith is doubtful and that it is the duty of the 'true' Muslims to preach and proselytise faith even if it requires use of force. This in later years developed into a potent idea of *tafkiri* Islam that has been used by various *jihadi* groups to justify killings in the name of

[4] The Islamic concept of afterlife is based on the ideas of resurrection and judgement; and is known as *Yawm al-Qiyamah*. This is considered to be the end of the world when humans would be judged for their deeds by Allah based on their *iman* (faith) and would be assigned *jannah* (heaven) or *jahannam* (hell). Quran, Hadith and Islamic traditions are full of descriptions about hereafter, which is supposed to be an integral part of faith. In other words a lack of belief on the day of resurrection and judgement leads to incomplete *iman*.

religion (Gibb, 1972; Algar, 2002; Commins, 2006). The main reason for Wahhab to emphasise on going back to fundamentals was his keenness to stop the decline of Islam and Muslims. For him the possibility of plurality within Islam did not exist because he viewed early Islamic history as his main source of inspiration and refuted "exegetical writings of previous and contemporary scholars" who according to him "misled Muslims and caused them to adopt the habits and customs of *shirk*" (Firro, 2013: 771).

Scholars suggest that Wahhabism was basically a Unitarian movement that called for following on the path of *salaf* and rejected any deviation as *bida'a* (Haj, 2009; Warburg, 2009; Firro, 2013). This idea brought it into conflict with existing trends in Islam, especially Sufis and Shiism. Sufis and Shias were Wahhab's main target because they, according to him, deviated from true Islam and became influenced with *Yahud* (Jews) and *Nasara* (Christians) which led to innovations in Islam and reversion to pre-Islamic practices. A number of popular practices in Sufi and Shia Islam, such as making permanent structure over graves and visiting the dead for seeking divine intervention, were condemned by Wahhab as practices of heretics and apostates (Warburg, 2009). Wahhab denounced as *shirk* (polytheism) and *kufr* (disbelief) everything that was not in line with the interpretations of Ibn Hanbal and Ibn Taymiyyah. For him "all *mushrikuns* [polytheists] too were unbelievers, as were those who did not regard idolaters as unbelievers, those who were seen with idolaters and who helped them against the Muslims" (Sirriyeh, 1989: 125).

By the time the Saudi-Wahhabi alliance was formed, the message of Wahhab "had achieved significant impact and regional notoriety" (Crawford, 2011: 148) and thereafter, acquired mass following under Saudi political patronage. Simultaneously, it invited opposition from established schools of both Sunni and Shia Islams, mainly among ulema in the holy cities of Mecca and Medina and other seats of Islamic learning such as Basra and Cairo (Al-Shaykh, 1974; Traboulsi, 2002). It is argued that on the one hand Wahhabi teachings found acceptance and gained followers because of its call for following the *salaf*, a "message that had resonated throughout the ages" in the Arab-Islamic world, on the other hand it invoked "stiff resistance" because of its appropriation of the same terming the other Muslims as *mushrikin* and *kuffar* (Fattah, 2003: 148).

The religious message of Wahhabi reform movement gained wider popularity due to it evoking the ideas of *salaf* and subsequently inspired similar movements in other parts of the Islamic world such as Sansui movement in Libya and Ahl-e-Hadith movement in the India. Similar religious reformers arguing for imbibing the *salaf* had also emerged in other parts of the Muslim world; for example, Waliullah Dehlavi[5] (1703-1762) in India argued for the need to reform Islamic practices (Akhter, 2009). The simplicity of Wahhabi interpretations did attract common Muslims, inspired other movements and found reception among many leading thinkers. For example, Rashid Rida (1865-1935), a leading Islamic modernist thinker was inspired by Wahhabi ideas. Similarly, Palestinian-American scholar Ismail Raji al-Faruqi (1921-1986) termed Wahhabism as a “model for reforming and rejuvenating Islam in the modern era” (Delong-Bas, 2004: 3). It also encountered religious opposition because of its opposition to ‘local Islamic’ practices. The experience of lived Islam in different parts of the world is unique and has peculiarities (Nurcholish, 2003; Hirji, 2010; Akayev, 2010).

There were some social aspects of opposition to Wahhabism. It attracted criticisms from the established socio-political elites because it opposed any idea of stratification based on descent. It opposed social hierarchies prevalent in Muslim societies whereby Ashrafs/Sayyids — descendants of the Prophet’s family (both Shia and Sunni) and his son-in-law and fourth Caliph Ali — enjoyed a privileged position because of their descent (Kazuo, 2012). Wahhabi interpretations challenged this existing social order and found opposition among many groups including the Sharifs of Mecca (the family that now rules the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan). However, the opposition emanated more from its political message. Its emphasis on changing the political order and establishment of a pious Islamic state to fulfil the duty of *Amr bi al-M‘aroof wa Nahi ‘an al-Munkar* (commanding good and forbidding wrong) (Crawford, 2011).[6] Scholars

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[5] Waliullah Dehlavi’s real name was Qutbuddin Ahmad ibn Abdul Rahim, he was born in a prominent religious family of Shahjahanabad (now Old Delhi) at a time when the Mughal empire was on decline. He is regarded as one of the founding fathers of reassessing Islamic theology in the light of modern thought in the Indian context. Although Dehlavi and Wahhab were contemporaries, there is no evidence to show that either he borrowed from his thought or was inspired by his teachings (Akhter, 2009).

[6] It is a Quranic verse which is linked to the idea of *shahada* and which conventionally has been understood as a commitment to pursue what is socially good and to reject what is harmful and abominable. The idea is linked to the commitment towards *tawheed* as propagated in the teachings of Muhammad bin Abdul Wahhab where an emphasis has been put on utterance as well as practice.

Natana J. Delong-Bas (2004) and Samira Haj (2009) disagree on the political component of the movement saying it evolved only at the later stages and argue that Wahhabi reform movement should be looked as continuation of the “long-standing arguments within the Muslim tradition over Islamic or un-Islamic nature” of day-to-day practices and hence looking at it from the point of view of its later *avatar* that moved it in political direction is misleading (Haj, 2009: 35).

Nevertheless, the political-ideological component of Wahhabism cannot be ignored, primarily because of its alliance with al-Saud and resultant political mission that manifested in formation of the three Saudi states (Al-Yassini, 1985; Commins, 2006; Farsy, 1986; Lewis, 2007; Al-Atawaneh, 2009).[7] Israeli-Arab scholar Muhammad Al-Atawaneh (2009) argues that Wahhabism does not delineate religion from politics or spiritual from material and that Islam according to Wahhabi doctrine is a “comprehensive system of governing everything public, social and Political”, that is, all aspects of life including the individual and collective behaviour of human beings (Al-Atawaneh, 2009: 724-725). According to Bernard Lewis (2007), the importance of Wahhabism was significantly enhanced once the holy cities of Mecca and Medina were conquered by Ibn Saud in 1925-26 and the discovery of oil that led to massive revenue generation for the Saudi-Wahhabi state. Subsequently, it gained wider following and inspired social, political and evangelist movements in different parts of the world; for example Taliban (Pakistan-Afghanistan), Tableegh (India), Sansui (Libya), Ahl-e-Hadith (India-Pakistan) and al-Nour Party (Egypt). In addition, many strands of religious extremists among Muslims such as al-Qaeda and Islamic State adhere to Wahhabi school (Heghammer, 2010; Lacroix, 2011; Bunzel, 2015).

In contemporary Saudi Arabia, Wahhabism became a political ideology and emerged as a source of legitimacy for al-Saud but was packaged as Islamism to acquire broader acceptance (Hopwood, 1982; Kèchichian, 1986; Niblock, 2006; Al-Atawaneh, 2009). Scholars such as Mai Yamani (2006) and Madawi al-Rasheed (2006) argue that the coming into power of the Saudi-Wahhabi alliance perpetuated the spread of Wahhabi

[7] First Saudi state (1744-1818), Second Saudi state (1824-1891) and Third Saudi state (1902-till date); see Annexure II.

Islam in the Arabian Peninsula and beyond and led to marginalisation of other Islamic streams such as Shias and Sufis. This predominance of Wahhabi Islam led scholars to see the Saudi society as backward and dismiss it as ‘conservative’, ‘averse to change’, ‘religious’, ‘dogmatic’ and so on (Lipsky, 1959; Wenner, 1975; Humphreys, 1979; House, 2012). It is argued that the Saudi society is “a critical test case for fundamentalism” (Humphreys, 1979: 9) and that the society is “...accustomed to dependence, to being reactive not proactive; to accepting, not questioning; to being obedient, not challenging; to being provided for rather than being responsible for their own futures” (House, 2012: 65).

Despite its socio-political influence and ideological significance, Wahhabism alone cannot explain the process of change and reforms in Saudi society because of the significance of social traditions and ‘modernisation’ process, as examined in the thesis, in the evolution of the state and society.

Tradition and Modernisation

Tradition can be understood as a belief or behaviour that has been passed down within a group or community with some symbolic meaning and importance attached to it and the origins of which can be located in the past. According to Edward Shils (1981) tradition is something which is transmitted or handed down from the past to the present. Max Weber (1958) while proposing his theory of authority defines tradition in terms of modes of production differentiating between industrialised and agrarian societies. Later theoretical developments have termed such categorisation as simplistic because traditional tools continue to significantly impact behaviour even in modernised societies. In the case of Saudi Arabia, the most important aspect about tradition is that social customs based in the tribal social structure continue to have a high position in the system of values as examined in Chapter Five.

Scholars argue that traditional structures such as tribe, familial ties and ethnic relations, descent etc. continue to be significant factors in the socio-political life in the Arab world (Billingsley, 2010) and more so in the case of Saudi Arabia (Al-Yassini, 1985). Traditional social structures and units continue to remain important and play a significant role in shaping individual and collective behaviours and are guided by

principles based on descent and kinship ties. This is visible in all domains, including politics, judiciary, education system, economy and status of women. For example, the al-Saud had come to power and sustained it with the help of the traditional symbols of power, that is, material wealth, military might and political acumen. In a Bedouin society, this demanded allocation of power and wealth to acquire loyalty and legitimacy. Tribe (*qabila*) and family (*usrah*) remain the basic units and continue to be the deciding factor in social and political behaviour. Genealogy has social, political and economic significance and is accepted as the primary basis of identity (Samin, 2015).

Likewise, knowledge production, despite modernisation and reforms in the education system, depends largely on traditional methods; for example dissemination of existing information gains higher significance than probing newer ideas. The judiciary largely depends on customary laws and *shari'a* and despite efforts at streamlining the courts, the system draws on tradition to issue judgements that are often devoid of any understanding of evolution of human thought and behaviour and are even 'savage' and 'brutal' by 'modern' standards. The legal norms that were implemented in the beginning "maintained the supremacy of Islamic law ... not in traditional Islamic but in contemporary legal forms" (Schacht 1959: 138). The economy which is largely modernised in terms of tools of economic production depends on familial ties and kinship contacts as far as ownership and division of wealth are concerned, thus is intertwined with the tribal social structure. Tradition continues to be a significant factor in social behaviour and people identify with family and tribe and prefer to stick to established customs when it comes to marriage, family and social interactions. While tradition, customs and local culture are important components of socioeconomic and political life, 'modernisation' too has been an important part of contemporary Saudi realities.

Modernity is defined mainly in terms of secularization, industrialization and nation-state structures. It is described on the basis of mode of production as feudalism, capitalism and agrarianism. In intellectual sense, it is defined in terms of reason and rationalisation of knowledge and scientific and technological developments in the works of classical theorists such as Marx, Weber and Durkheim. European enlightenment was a product of rationalisation of knowledge and secularisation of the society leading to separation of

church and state, with religion becoming a part of individual's private domain. It was followed with scientific and technological advancements and societies transformed from 'traditional' to 'modern'. This transformation, however, might not be valid for all societies as modernity did not develop simultaneously in all parts of the world rather it originated in a specific time and space and spread to other societies through 'colonisation' (Praffit, 2002).

In the case of Saudi Arabia, modernisation has followed a unique trajectory. Firstly, the country was never exposed to direct colonial experience and hence, modernisation did not come as a result of anti-colonial and nationalist resistance movement as was the case with other Third World post-colonial states. Secondly, it experienced a sudden surge in financial fortunes as a result of oil-generated wealth, a lack of which kept many of the post-colonial societies struggling for economic development. These two factors have made the Saudi transformation sudden and unique and unleashed a skewed sense of 'progress' and 'modernisation' on a society that had until the early 20th century remained engrained in a nomadic Bedouin lifestyle. It has experienced massive developments in terms of market economy, use of technology, infrastructure, industries and urbanisation riding on oil-generated affluence. At the same time, the traditional structures of the society, especially those based in faith and customs continue to play a vital role in social, political and economic domains.

Since establishment of the Kingdom in 1932, modernisation has been an important plank in Saudi statecraft, and together with Wahhabi Islam, has played a significant role in legitimising the al-Saud rule (Al-Rasheed, 2010). Introduction of modern administrative, economic and administrative tools and institutions such as Council of Ministers, ministries and *Majlis al-Shura* has been pivotal in maintaining the rule and transforming the society. In this context, it can be argued that Saudi Arabia has largely remained a consumer of 'modernity' as the rulers introduced modern tools in different aspects of life depending on its acceptability in the society without transforming into a 'modern society' as is generally understood. Early efforts at modernisation focussed on the economy and administration and to a degree on the education system and varying level of successes were achieved. Economy became largely modernised in terms of modes of production as petroleum industry emerged and other industries started to grow

alongside. Some conscious efforts at use of technology and modern methods in the traditional modes of production such as agriculture and crafts led to a change in economic organisation as explained in Chapter Three. Similarly, 'modern' administrative tools and institutions were incorporated within the traditional state structure and 'modern' education system was introduced to provide the people with skills to find employment in this newly formed administrative system.

These were not easy moves in a society that was entrenched in tradition and religious dogma and efforts at 'modernisation' met with various degrees of resistance and rejection; for example, the introduction of railway network, telegraph, television etc. met with resistance from various sections, especially the Wahhabi ulema. Similarly, introduction of modern education was opposed leading the king to cede administrative responsibilities of education to ulema (Lipsky, 1959; Al-Yassini, 1985; Prokop, 2003). At times, the opposition acquired violent political manifestations such as the Ikhwan who in the 1920s rebelled against the 'compromises' made by Ibn Saud with the Wahhabi ideals and his alliance with the British. It led to eventual use of force to suppress the movement to secure the state. It needs to be emphasised that such resistance against 'modernity' continues in contemporary Saudi Arabia but has not been as staunch as Ikhwan. To counter this resistance and to strengthen the state, it was important to not shed the religious and cultural basis of the state which was provided by the Wahhabi heritage and tribal traditions. This juxtaposition of 'tradition' and 'modernisation' is a defining feature in contemporary Saudi history.

Thus contemporary Saudi society strongly identifies with Wahhabi Islam, local culture and tradition and modernisation in various ways and this is visible in daily lives; in *abaya* clad women and *thob* wearing men shopping hand-in-hand in super markets and malls or seen in the functioning of super speciality hospitals and universities with separate male and female branches. Many Saudi women balance work inside and outside home while adhering to traditional ways and demands. Many have achieved leadership positions in various fields and can lead huge business assignments and represent industries but cannot drive vehicles on city roads because it is considered as against the local custom. This interplay of Islam, tradition and modernisation is an important factor in contemporary Saudi society and can help understand the process of

change and reforms. In this context, Islamic modernism can provide a useful framework as it inherently takes into account these three components.

Islamic Modernism

The assertion that Islam and 'modernity' complement each other in spite of the differences in time and space of their origins is unique to Islamic modernism. The idea was pioneered by scholars such as Jamaladdin Afghani (1838-1897), Muhammd Abduh (1849-1905) and Syed Ahmed Khan (1817-1898) and further developed and propagated by the likes of Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938), Rashid Rida (1865-1935), Ali Shariati (1933-1977), Hassan Hanafi (1935-), Abdul Karim Soroush (1945-) and others.

Islam plays an important role in contemporary Arab-Muslim societies mainly in three ways, namely, as a religion (meaning as a set of faith and duties), as an ideology and as a symbol of cultural identity (Humphreys, 1979: 2). These aspects, however, do not function in isolation rather co-exist and affect each other and with other ideas. In the words of Pakistani scholar Fazlur Rahman: "Islam has felt the impact of, and responded to, the manifold forces of modern life – intellectual, scientific, and socio-political since the dawn of the impingement of modernity in Muslim society" (Rahman, 1966: 113). He further argues that "There is hardly any facet of the life of Muslim society which has remained untouched [with modern life] and the story of these impacts and the Muslim attempts to absorb, transform, reject or adjust, is fascinating" (ibid: 113). Further, it is argued that "Contemporary Islamic thought is characterised by diversified styles of thinking and a competition of ideas in the midst of ideological conflicts and enthusiasm for reform" (Ibrahim, 2012: 279).

Islamic modernism, unlike Wahhabism, is a social construct, a framework of progress for Muslim societies. Islamic modernism is one of the major ideas that have stimulated intellectual discourse in Muslim societies beginning with their colonial experience and emerged as a response to modern ideas and thoughts coming from the West. It recognises the significance of factors such as Islam, tradition and modernisation, and calls for synergy of these variables in developing a framework or a roadmap for progress. The fusing together of these variables are a necessary pre-requisite for bringing Muslim societies out of their 'decline' and 'slumber'. Islamic modernism is

concerned with the problem of stagnation in Muslim intellectual progress and appreciates European philosophical developments and scientific advancements. This appreciation of the 'modern' does not devoid them of the consciousness of Islam's past glory and its contribution to advancement of world societies. Hence, the idea is a product of an extensive cultural encounter between the West and the Islamic world (Moaddel, 2005).

Islamic modernism called on Muslims to adjust to the modern thought within an Islamic framework and envisaged rationalisation of Islam in the light of modernity (Duderija, 2007). It called for a rethinking and reinterpreting the basic texts of Islam – Quran and Hadith – to extract newer ways for facing the modern world. The exponents of such scholarly articulations were of the view that Islam and modernity can co-exist and that because it is a rational philosophy, modern rational ideas do not challenge the Islamic belief system but rather are complimentary to it (Keddie, 1968). This line of argument contradicted the position that rejected modern thought as blasphemous and antithesis to Islam (Duderija, 2007).

Islamic modernist thinkers such as Afghani, Abduh and Khan were convinced that it was important to understand and adopt modernity and reform the society accordingly but within an Islamic paradigm. Lebanese-British historian Albert Hourani (1983) argues that ascendency of Europe and decline of various Muslim societies forced these intellectuals to think about reforms in Muslim societies. They were troubled with questions whether such reforms can be based on or derived from Islamic principles or whether it was necessary to adopt and adapt to changes being experienced in Europe encapsulated as 'modernity' (Hourani, 1983: 67). Inspired by each other, these scholars tried to respond to these questions and broadly agreed that it is necessary to find solution within Islam but benefit from modernity.

Thus, the most important idea in Islamic modernist thought is reconciliation of faith with modern values such as democracy, nationalism, equality, progress and pluralism, and scientific and technological advancements. Fazlur Rahman argues that the early Muslim modernists "envisaged Islamic reform as a comprehensive venture" and took into account major issues pertaining to Muslim societies, such as, ".... law, society,

politics and intellectual, moral and spiritual issues. It dealt with questions of the law of evidence, the status of women, modern education, constitutional reforms, the right of a Muslim to think for himself, God and the nature of the universe and man and man's freedom," which led to a "tremendous intellectual fervour and ferment" (Rahman, 1970: 317) . Mansoor Moaddel contends that Islamic modernism "endeavored to devise a model for reorganizing the structure of authority, for drawing the basic principles of rule making", and "a critical reexamination of the classical conceptions and methods of jurisprudence and a formulation of a new approach to Islamic theology and Quranic exegesis" (Moaddel, 2005: 2).

Islamic modernism argues for restructuring of the society based on interpretation of sacred texts and established *fiqh* (jurisprudence) and *shari'a*. It envisaged using the existing theological tools namely *ijma'a* (consensus), *ijtihad* (reasoning) and *maslaha* (common good), that were used by the ulema and jurists in earlier times, to deduce the *shari'a*. It is argued that the *shari'a* was deduced from the basic sources to have an Islamic way of life that suits people in the given time and there is need to revise the same to produce legislation that complements with the modern life.

While Islamic modernism was concerned with reforming Muslim societies and deriving a set of rules and regulation suited to modern scientific temper, it was equally engaged with the idea of preserving the Islamic faith and belief systems as propagated in Quran and Hadith. According to Aziz Ahmad (1967a), the modernist thought in Islam sought to rethink or adapt Islamic ideals, institutions and norms to deal with the challenges and opportunities created by 'modernity'. Thus, it rejected the practice of *taqlid* (imitation) and *qiyas* (analogy) and articulated for reopening the doors of *ijtihad* (reasoning) and *ijma'a* (consensus). Mansoor Moaddel elaborates,

> The central theological problems that engaged these thinkers revolved around the questions of the validity of the knowledge derived from the sources of jurisprudence: the Quran, the dicta attributed to the Prophet (*hadith*), the consensus of the theologians (*ijma*), and juristic reasoning by analogy (*qiyas*). They resolved to reinterpret the first two sources and to transform the last two in order to formulate a reformist project in light of the prevailing standards of scientific rationality and modern social theory (Moaddel, 2005: 2).

Islamic modernism did not reject the cultural heritage and historical evolution of Islam as in the case of Wahhabism but rather it emphasised on the idea that Islam provides

space for questioning and revision of established principles as necessitated by new developments with time (Abduh, 1906; Abduh, 2004). It was more an endorsement of early and middle-age Islamic practices than a rejection. Nikkie Keddie (1968) states that Islamic modernist thinkers were influenced by medieval Islamic philosophy (*falsafa*) and relied on it for devising newer ways for intellectual revival in Islamic thought. For instance, she argues, "Many of the ideas which Abduh is assumed to have got from the Mu'tazilites he could have easily got from the [medieval Islamic] philosophers" such as Ibn Khaldun and Ibn Sina (Keddie, 1968: 53).[8]

Another important aspect of Islamic modernist scholars is their effort to contest the colonial narrative about Islam and Muslims. Afghani called both for internal reforms at all levels and presenting a unified front against the West. He insisted that "Islam was in harmony with the principles discovered by scientific reason" (Dawisha, 2003: 19). Abduh too was concerned with rising popularity of secular thought in Muslim societies and articulated the need for modernising Islamic thought to counter the secular-western narratives and towards this recommended reforming the education system and social institutions (Al-Jabiri, 1980). He argued that "Muslims would not be able to resist modernity and the West until they acquired a modern education, including in 'rational' science" (Grabus, 2012: 272).

Islamic modernism does not reject the impact of modernity on Islam rather welcomes it as part of continuation of the historical process of exchange and enrichment of ideas and philosophies. The seeds of Islamic modernism germinated in Egypt and the earliest proponent of the idea was Rifa Rafi al-Tahtawi (1801-1873) who articulated the need for development in Egypt along the lines of France (Ammarah, 1973). With more scholars articulating Islamic modernist ideas, it spread to other parts of the Muslim world. As mentioned, early scholars such as Afghani, Abduh and Khan inspired many others to explore possibilities of reconciliation between Islam and modernity. The idea developed gradually and gained further acceptance through the works of Rida and Iqbal but in the mid-20th century largely lost its sheen to secular ideas such as nationalism and

[8] Mu'tazila is a trend in Islamic theology that emphasised on reason and rational thinking. It flourished between the eighth and tenth centuries in Basra and Baghdad. The assertion of Mu'tazalite scholars on creative nature of Quran as a divine *kalam* put them apart from other school of thoughts (Martin, 1997).

socialism or calls for religious revivalism such as Wahhabism. It was only after the end of colonialism and emergence of new independent states in post-Ottoman Muslim world that Islamic modernist ideas regained some support (Siddiqi, 1970; Ahmad, 1967b; Wasti, 2010).

A new generation of Islamic modernist scholars further developed the ideas and scholars such as Fazlur Rahman (1919-1988), Mohamed Talbi (b. 1921), Ali Shariati (1933-1977), Muhammad al-Jabari (1935-2010), Hassan Hanafi (b. 1935), Asghar Ali Engineer (1939-2013), Abdul Karim Soroush (b. 1945), Tariq Ramadan (b. 1962) and others contributed to the developments in Islamic modernism. As the modernist ideas in Islamic thought took roots and became a major component of Muslims' discourse, it reached a wider audience and influenced newer debates. New political developments and emergence of Muslim political entities in the form of nation-states threw newer challenges and many political and religious thinkers inspired by Islamic modernist ideology tried to develop Islamic frameworks for politics and governance (Moaddel, 2005).

During late 20th century many scholars recognised the plurality within Islam and stated that an insistence on universal Islam is not a right approach as lived Islam has experienced local influences and that the path and form of reforms has to be determined within the context of modernisation at a specific time and space (Rahman, 1970: 332). Hassan Hanafi developed the idea of *al-Yasar al-Islami* (Islamic left) and *al-Thurath wa al-Tajdid* (Heritage and Renewal) arguing that "human beings and history are at the centre of Islamic religious consciousness" and that "liberal theology intended to serve as a revolutionary ideology enabling Muslims to face modern challenges" is needed to redeem Muslim societies (Boullata, 1990: 40-45). He further argued that Islam can provide an answer to modern challenges and that Muslim as a group should not be just a subject of study, rather using Quranic interpretations and Islamic theology, they can find solutions to contemporary problems (Hanafi, 1988). Hanafi emphasises on the importance of civil society in contributing to confront modern challenges within an Islamic perspective (Hanafi, 2002; Kersten, 2007).

Islamic modernist thought evolved through time and developed as a major source of debates and discourses in contemporary Islam. It spread far and wide and a new generation of scholars came from countries including Tunisia, Morocco, Indonesia, Malaysia, and among Muslims in the West. Scholarly works on Islam as a set of faith, a way of life and a political ideology have challenged the traditional notions of religion and have continuously strived for devising Islamic tools to integrate Muslim societies and modernity. Lebanese political scientist Ahmad Mousalli argues that contemporary Islamic thought has "absorbed and 'Islamised' the notions of democracy and pluralism" through a mixture of early and medieval Islamic philosophy with the contemporary religious and political debates" (Mousalli, 2007: 438). Moreover, contemporary Islamic modernists have also been critical of many aspects of Islamic practices and have challenged the traditional notions of Islam on issues such as governance, women's rights, pluralism and individual freedom. For example Mohamed Talbi (1992; 1996), a Tunisian historian and thinker, argues that Islam is compatible with modernity but Muslims often confuse the time-bound Quranic injunctions to its universal timeless message of spirituality, peace and moderation. Similarly, Abdul Karim Soroush (1998) articulates the need for Islam to shed some of its weight to regain relevance in the modern world.

It is argued that Islamic message as propagated in Quran and Hadith may be applicable to the entire world but some of the injunctions were relevant only for the specific time and place and cannot be imposed in a different context, and that Muslims in general make this mistake of putting equal emphasis on aspects that are universal and contextual. For instance, Islamic tradition of s*hura*, though had some elements of participation, it was a practice that was suited for the tribal society in the Arabian Peninsula at the time of Islamic revelations. Since a better way of governance, that is democracy, has evolved in modern times, it should be acquired in Muslim societies too (Talbi, 1992; Talbi, 1996; Soroush, 1998).

Similarly, on the question of women's rights and individual freedom, many contemporary Muslim scholars urge the need for rethinking traditional ideas. Egyptian modernist scholar Qasim Amin (1863-1908) was one of the early proponents of freedom for Muslim women but contemporary scholars such as Moroccan modernist

scholar Fatima Mernissi (1940-2015) and Egyptian play write Nawal El Saadawi (b. 1931) have challenged the traditional ideas about women's rights and status. They argue that Islamic scriptures and injunctions do not discriminate against women and are inherently in favour of equality of sexes, and that gender discrimination is rather a continuation of pre-Islamic Arab tradition that Muslims continued to practice (Mernissi, 1991, 2011; El Saadawi, 1999, 2002). Furthermore, Islamic modernism has evolved with time and many scholars have moved away from the idea of redefining everything within an Islamic perspective to the idea for a need to have a better and humane understanding of Islamic philosophy (Soroush, 1998; Al-Jabri, 1999; Arkoun, 2006).

At the same time, Islamic modernism has attracted criticisms from liberal-secular as well as conservative Muslims thinkers. There has been criticism about the relevance of Muslim modernist work beyond scholarly debates as well as its relevance in developmental discourse. For example, it is argued that the Islamic modernist debate, particularly after the 1950s, converged with the developmental debates prevalent in the Third World and Muslim countries (Sinanovic, 2012). Islamists rue that the Islamic modernist scholars focus on this world and not hereafter, which according to them is of far greater importance in Islam (Siddiqi, 1970). Further, it is argued that Islamic modernism is concerned with the condition of Muslims rather than about Islam and it does not provide an alternative system to maintain the faith and moral behaviour as prescribed in Islam and that Islamic modernist ideas lack guidelines on social, political and economic behaviours without which it is impossible to bring about the intended social transformation (Siddiqi, 1970, Tibi, 1995, 2009; Ibrahim 2012).

Another criticism is that Islamic modernism and Islamic reforms failed to cope with the ever-growing tensions emerging out of Islam's predicament with modernity. Bassam Tibi opines,

> Muslims have consistently been at unease with the cultural project of modernity. On the one hand, they have realized that they cannot thrive without adjusting to modern techno-scientific standards. On the other, however, they were not willing to alter their belief in the supremacy of sacred Islamic revelation, and thus they strongly refuse to subject any aspect of Islamic revelation to human reason (Tibi, 1995: 81).

Azhar Ibrahim argues that "Contemporary Islamic thought is characterised by diversified styles of thinking and a competition of ideas in the midst of ideological conflicts and enthusiasm for reform" (Ibrahim, 2012: 279). In the same vein, Fazlur

Rahman (1970) argues that the problem is that the idea of social change and reform did not find much resonance beyond intellectual realms because it was difficult for the governments and rulers to gain popular appeal for such transformation. He further argues that this situation has led to numerous problems including intellectual dichotomy in Muslim societies whereby traditionalism has been reemphasised in the name of introducing modernism (Rahman, 1970: 325).

Liberal-secularists are also critical of Islamic modernism for its insistence on defining modernity in terms of Islam or the need to preserve Islam while embracing modernity and hence, for them Islamic modernism is just another form of fundamentalism. Stephen Humphreys opines that the focus of thought in Islamic modernism "yields nothing to fundamentalism in its reverence for the traditional" sources and revolves around the Quran, Hadith and the *shari'a* as in the case of fundamentalist Islam (Humphreys, 1979: 4). The idea that Islamic modernist thought can be likened to fundamentalism is problematic and does not hold much vigour because the Islamist modernist and fundamentalist thought have various nuanced differences (Hoveyda, 2001; Fadel, 2011). Islamic modernism has also been criticised for being a revivalist movement that emerged as a response to threat perception about the invasion of Western thought and way of life. This cannot be completely rejected and is true to a large extent but one should not overlook the fact that Islamic modernism called for embracing modernity without losing Islamic roots.

Scholars have underlined the significance of looking at the reforms and changes in Muslim societies within the Islamic modernist framework. Mansoor Moaddel (2005) articulates that Muslims are in the process of evolving a balance between Islam and modernity and have come out with differing results as evident in Pakistan, Iran or Turkey. Bassam Tibi (2009) points out that the collision and interaction of Islam and modernity has created many problems in these societies but also provides them with a tool to move forward and chart their own histories and paths for progress. Javaid Saeed (1994) agrees and states that the chaotic conditions prevailing in the Muslim world is a result of collision and fusion between Islam and modernity that is trying to fill the normative vacuum to provide the framework of progress. What is common among these studies is that there cannot be one roadmap for development and progress for all

Muslim societies; each will have to chart their own path and the necessary ingredient is to not abandon Islam and local culture while acquiring modern thoughts and tools.

Further, Bassam Tibi (1990a) articulates the need for explaining and studying Muslim societies within an Islamic perspective and says since “Muslims perceive reality and evolve their worldview” based on “Islam as a system of cultural symbols” it should be employed for deconstruction of the transformation in Muslim societies (Tibi, 1990a: 126). Albert Hourani (1983) argues that various strands of thoughts developed in the Arab world with the fusion of conventional ideas, Islamic philosophies and modern European thought, thus, it is necessary to examine Arab-Muslim societies within the framework of local and indigenous ideas which have a greater influence on the society.

Islamic Modernism and Saudi Arabia

The al-Saud employed ‘Islam’ and ‘modernisation’ as tools to gain legitimacy and secure stability. In view of the traditional ethos, the socio-political milieu and need for economic growth, the Kingdom chose to stick with ‘Islam’ as the basis of state and introduced new elements of governance, technology, and infrastructure for economic welfare and education (Al-Rasheed, 2002: 92-9; Niblock, 2006: 30-33). Though other means including force were used to silence dissidents, ‘Islam’ and ‘modernisation’ remained the major plank in Saudi statecraft. The architect of this strategy was the founder King Ibn Saud and his sons used it successfully and were aided by the massive oil-wealth (Alkhathalan, 2013; Jones, 2010; Niblock and Malik, 2007). It led to the growth of the economy and expansion in the education, transport and communication systems to create means for social reforms. Some political and legal reforms too were undertaken (Kéchichian, 2013). This gradual but sustained process of reforms impacted the individual and collective thought processes leading to a change in people’s attitude toward and aspirations from the state. Therefore, the coexistence of Islam and modernity in the Saudi context has juxtaposed ontological and epistemological aspects to create a situation whereby a ‘modernised’ Islamic or Islamised ‘modern’ state and society have become plausible.

The initial process of transition was witnessed in economic and administrative spheres. This was not easy as there were oppositions to introduction of ‘Western’ technology,

mechanical transportation and communication systems and new practices in trade and business (al-Yassini, 1985; Kostiner, 1993). The most potent of these conservative forces were Ikhwan, who Ibn Saud decided to confront and subdue as they posed a threat to his idea of a 'modern' Saudi Kingdom. The opposition continued but did not deter Ibn Saud from taking steps such as exploration of oil, use of motor vehicles, introduction of telegrams and radio broadcasts, and operation of limited banking systems.

Simultaneously, some structural changes were introduced in the administrative system leading to the development of a nascent bureaucracy; for example, ministries and departments were formed to look after different aspects of governance (Kostiner, 1993). Together with the ulema, merchants formed an important support base of the monarchy. At the same time, it was important to find ways for economic welfare of the people to gain wider legitimacy in the prevailing structures of the society and Ibn Saud decided to allow the merchants to do business on their terms and took initiatives to organize the financial system in the country (Niblock, 2006: 17-37). Subsequently, the exploration and production of petroleum provided the monarchy with an opportunity to overhaul the economy and venture into other aspects of development. As a result, the second stage of reforms witnessed organization of the judiciary and education system. This, however, evoked criticisms from the traditional and Islamic elements (Al-Yassini, 1985) and effectively slowed down the reform process.

Hence, by the 1980s, the Kingdom had fairly organized administrative, economic, judicial, and educational systems but they had remained largely engrained in the local cultural and religious ethos in their philosophy and functioning (Kéchichian, 2013; Niblock, 2006). The judiciary and education remained largely under the influence of the ulema, and graduates from religious seminaries were preferred for administrative positions in the bureaucracy. The religious content in school, college, and university curriculum remained high in addition to the presence of a number of higher education institutions dedicated exclusively to Islamic studies (Prokop, 2003). Judges were drawn from these religious schools to uphold *shari'a*-based judgments (Al-Jarbou, 2004).

With changing economic needs and some internal demands for reforms, the situation started to change. Economic compulsions forced the monarchy to invest in human resource development and expansion of educational facilities. With a rising population and declining oil-wealth the need to provide economic welfare and better job opportunities began to reverberate. Therefore, the monarchy took measures to improve the quality and accessibility of education, condition of science and technological education and creation of employment opportunities (Bahgat, 1999; Dekmejian, 2003). It also took measures to respond to the disgruntled sections of ulema and conservative populace which were unhappy with marginalization of traditional Islamic ideals.

Internal demands and regional events such as the Iran-Iraq war (1980-88) and Kuwait crisis (1990-91), petition movements, 11 September 2001 attacks in the US, and more recently the Arab Spring, forced the monarchy to take more reform measures. In the process, areas such as political participation, education, condition of women, role of the ulema and religion, have experienced limited but significant changes. As far as political participation is concerned, some openings have been allowed, particularly for the surging middle classes. Though the decision-making process remains confined to the royal family, the idea of consultation with the larger public has been implemented. Initiatives such as the institutionalization of *Majlis al-Shura*, nomination of women members, a national dialogue program, inter-faith dialogue etc. are manifestations of a policy of consultation process. Elections for local, administrative and professional bodies have also provided a grievance-redressal mechanism and a limited political participation. A large number of modern-educated people from various strata of the society have become part of the administration at the higher level, which has a degree of decision-making abilities. Significantly, the overhaul of the judicial system, a state-controlled but fairly functioning media and civil-society and scope for raising voices from within has added to the political opening.

In all the areas the glass-ceiling remains and hence the monarchy has faced internal as well as external criticisms for the way it has dealt with many issues including political opposition, women's rights, religious freedom, and youth aspirations. With modest shifts in internal situation and existing economic and administrative structures, the role and function of religion and the ulema in the society has also experienced change. Saudi

Arabia is a monarchy where the clergy have a stake in the political structure and functioning of the state and wield immense influence among the people and the ruling family. Nonetheless, there is an increasing trend with respect to the institutionalization of the bureaucracy and the waning influence of the institutionalised religious clergy (Al-Yassini, 1985; Stenslie, 2012). The reasons that have been attributed to this phenomenon are the rise of middle classes of modern educated people of technocrats, scientists and educationists who have been increasingly preferred for their training, skills and influence in the society over the traditional ulema.

Another aspect is the changing attitude toward religion and its social functions among individuals, particularly among the new generations of youth, which have also contributed to decline in the role of the ulema. Factors such as economic progress, external exposure, demographic change, and the resultant transition in social behaviour, have contributed to the phenomenon. The people do not want to follow conventional norms and are going through a process whereby normative behaviour is also changing. The nomination of non-Hanbali ulema in the Council of Senior Ulema in 2009 and invitation to Shia ulema to be part of national dialogue process in 2003 are signs of the changing attitude of the state toward religion (Kéchichian, 2013: 34-62). Furthermore, growing participation of women in the economy and public life despite opposition from conservative ulema is an illustration of the evolving contours of religion and the ulema.

Education is a significantly important area that has witnessed massive expansion and improvements, and in turn helps drive the process of transition. Although the intended goals were mainly economic, that is, to provide trained manpower and find employment, the process has generated socio-political awareness. Aspiration for a knowledge-based economy has helped improve both the education system and the economic growth but simultaneously has also catalyzed an unprecedented and complex process of social transition. One of the effects of this complex process is the changing attitude towards women, their role in public life and situation in the society. To a limited extent it has sparked a debate on the status of women. Significantly, the female population has benefitted from expansion and modernisation of education leading to some improvement in terms of their participation in the economy, as well as public life. Another significant area where change is visible is the attitude of the youth who have

become connected with the outside world and aspire to live with freedom of choice and to participate in the decision-making process. A small section of youth with western education and global outlook despise power being confined within a small group of religious-political elite.

A complex process of transition cannot occur in vacuum. Such processes require normative basis and in the Saudi case as well, this ontological transformation is based in epistemological convictions. However, it is not based on one single ideological strand and the normative behaviour itself has been a product of an intricate and nuanced juxtaposition of various available thoughts. A multiplicity of normative and functional factors drive the complex but steady process of transition in Saudi Arabia whereby various ideas compete for space to give shape to these processes. As the Kingdom witnesses a complex process of transition and goes through a steady phase of reforms many competing ideas and thoughts combine to provide the normative basis for it. Neither the process nor the basis for it is institutionalized or linear. It can be described as a situation that has been set in motion whereby 'Islam' remains an important part of the socio-political landscape while an inexorable process of 'modernisation' has begun.

This is where one can bring the question of compatibility between the social reform process in the Kingdom and the idea of Islamic modernism and envisage an Islamic modern or modernised Islamic society that functions in peace with scientific advancements. The Saudi context has various divergences from the idea envisaged by Islamic modernism but it does employ the three main ingredients, namely Islam, tradition and modernisation which compel one to see the changes and reforms in Saudi society within the conceptual framework of Islamic modernism.

The social reform process in Saudi Arabia has been catalysed by multiple factors but primarily it is catalysed by the conflict between strict adherence to religious tenets as defined by the Wahhabi school and the necessity to introduce 'modernisation' to sustain the state. The tension did not settle in favour of one but rather has continued. The idea to retain and preserve 'pristine' Islam and cultural traditions co-existed with, though not always in harmony, with the idea to 'modernise' in terms of material advancements. This interplay of Islam, tradition and modernisation became the driving forces behind

changes and evolution in the society. Another important feature is the top-down nature of the reforms that radiates from the prevailing political system but due to the changing nature of the society and social churnings some scope for bottom-up reforms has been created (Montagu, 2010, 2015; Thompson, 2011, 2014).

Conclusion

As demonstrated in the next five chapters, the three variables, namely Islam, tradition and modernisation intermix to catalyse the social reforms process in Saudi Arabia. Islam as part of faith, as a philosophy, lifestyle and cultural heritage significantly shapes people's lives, behaviour and social structures and interactions. Tradition because the way state and society function, they are a continuation of the past and traditional values and norms continue to play a determining factor in socio-political life. Modernisation as it is used as a tool to enhance legitimacy and assert authority leading to semblance of 'modernity' in many domains such as the economy with a growth-oriented development approach, adoption of technology, rapid industrialisation and urbanisation and changing social behaviour among the citizenry.

Chapter Three

Historical Background

On 13 January 1902, a group of men belonging to the al-Saud clan and allied families under the leadership of Ibn Saud conquered the town of Riyadh in Najd region dislodging rival al-Rashid family of Shammar tribe. A surprise morning attack on the Masmak Castle located in the heart of the old city of Riyadh ended a decade long rule of al-Rashid and laid the foundation for the third Saudi state. This was also the beginning of the Saudi capture and conquest of the entire Najd region that culminated with the capture of Hail in 1921 and total subjugation of the al-Rashid who enjoyed the support of Ottoman Sultan. Simultaneously, Ibn Saud united and extended his influence within the Unaiza tribe to which al-Saud clan belonged and over other prominent friendly tribes such as Qahtan, Mutayr and Utaiba and rival tribes such as Shammar, Herb, Dawasir and others (Habib, 1978). The consolidation was accomplished through a complex process of patronage, distribution of wealth, security alliances, political deals and marital ties (Kostiner, 1993; Al-Rasheed, 2010). The one and half century old alliance with Wahhabi ulema was also instrumental in extending al-Saud influence over the vast areas of the Arabian Peninsula. Ibn Saud sought and acquired help from the British, who were looking to weaken the Ottoman Empire (Khan, 2007) and through the Treaty of Darin (1915) he received an annual subsidy of £5,000 paid in gold (Troeller, 1976; Vassiliev, 1998; Vassiliev, 2013).

In 1924 Ibn Saud launched attack on Hejaz which had religious, political and economic importance and set out to fight against the Sharifs of Mecca (the Hashemite ruler of Hejaz).[1] The al-Saud-Sharifian rivalry had broader overtones, especially after Sharif

[1] The Sharifs of Mecca were at the forefront of the Arab Revolt (1916) against the Ottoman Empire and founded the Kingdom of Syria in 1920 but it was dismantled by France soon after. Subsequently, the Emirate of Transjordan (1921) and Kingdom of Iraq (1921) was established under British mandate but they were eventually dislocated from their roots in Hejaz in 1925 and currently rule the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan (Susser and Shmuelevitz, 1995; Paris, 2003).

Hussein declared himself as the Caliph[2] after the office was abolished by Kemal Ataturk in March 1924 following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. Ibn Saud was alarmed by Hussein's move as he saw it as a bid to establish supremacy in the Arabian Peninsula (Kostiner, 1993). The Sharifs were easily defeated and al-Saud captured the cities of Taif and Mecca in 1924 and Medina and Jeddah the following year. The emirate was named Kingdom of Hejaz and Najd in 1926 (Lacey, 1981). Once the holy cities of Mecca and Medina came under al-Saud rule, local, regional and international standings of the fledgling emirate enhanced and territorial expansion continued. By the end of 1920s Najran region in the south, remaining parts of Hasa region in the east and portions beyond Hail region in north-west close to Iraq were captured. Raids inside Iraqi borders and other emirates on the Gulf were prevented by the British but resented by the Ikhwan fighters, leading to a confrontation between them and the forces loyal to Ibn Saud (Habib, 1978), and on 23 September 1932, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was proclaimed under the leadership of Ibn Saud.[3]

The evolution of the Saudi state and society can be divided into distinct four phases: period before the discovery of oil (1930s and 1940s), post-oil period (1940s and 1950s), the period after the oil boom (1970s and 1980s) and the period after the Kuwait Crisis of 1990-91. This chapter traces the political, economic and administrative developments during the first three phases in the context of their impact on the society and social reforms.

Political Evolution

Politics and governance is a far more complicated issue in Saudi Arabia than commonly recognised. At one level, the monarchy has complete control over the state and its structures and they are not open for public. According the Basic Law introduced in

[2] He did not receive support from the wider Muslim world and many influential states such as Egypt and movements including the Indian Khilafat movement rejected the idea and rather were supportive of his rival al-Saudi ruler (Goldrup, 1971).

[3] Scholars have attributed many factors responsible for the rise and consolidation of the Saudi state. While some argue on the importance of Wahhabi religious zeal (Commins, 2006), others give primacy to Ibn Saud's leadership and charisma (Almana, 1980). Others concentrate on external alliances made by Ibn Saud particularly with the British (Sluglett and Farouk-Sluglett, 1982; Goldberg, 1986). These are all important factors but the most significant was the changing strategic and economic situation in the Arabian Peninsula (Kostiner, 1993).

March 1992 "constitution is Almighty's Holy Book" or Quran (Article 1) and hence, sovereignty lies with Allah and the ruler rules as His representative (Wahhab, 1986). Succession runs through the sons of the founder King[4] and since 1932 all senior positions are held by male members of the al-Saud. Public life is substantially restricted and political affairs remain a prohibited arena for common people. In the past, barring on a few occasions or a small section, majority of Saudis had reconciled to this arrangement and many continue to be supportive of the family rule in 'return' for the 'Islamic' and welfare state characters of the al-Saud rule. Nevertheless, a growing population especially the younger generations are uncomfortable and even resentful of this system, desire political participation and wish to have a say in deciding their fate (Quamar, 2014-15). While the status quo has endured, the Kingdom has undergone noticeable changes in its functions, institutions, composition of the ruling elite as well as in its immediate support base and popular appeals.

At the outset, Saudi Arabia was a unified tribal-political entity with a strong centre supported by various sections including Wahhabi ulema and Hejazi merchants who were recognised as important agents in the extension of al-Saud influence. The strong political interactions among various tribal groups in the Arabian Peninsula resulted in Ibn Saud relying upon traditional methods to secure and ensure legitimacy. In addition, he had to respond to challenges from within the family, particularly from his uncles and nephews as well as other branches of the al-Saud clan. He dealt with it by making them stake holders in the state, co-opted them through marriages and occasionally neutralised them by force (Al-Rasheed, 2010: 69-83).

In the early 20th century the international order was in turmoil and was amidst political and economic crises. The decline and eventual demise of the Ottoman Empire and changing international order had started impact on the Arabian Peninsula which had till then remained ingrained in *asabiya* (kinship) based socio-political and economic structures (Khoury and Kostiner, 1990; Kostiner, 1993; Billingsley, 2010). Traditional factors and methods which had helped in the process of revival of the Saudi state were no more enough to establish authority and consolidation of power. Ibn Saud needed to

[4] Until 29 April 2015, when King Salman appointed Muhammad bin Naif (a grandson of Ibn Saud) as Crown Prince only his sons had served as Kings and Crown Prince after him.

win support of cross-sections of the population that can withstand the test of time. In early decades, Ibn Saud had the absolute decision-making authority but he worked in consultation with his informal arrangement of *majlis*[5] and advisors (Al-Rasheed, 2010). Till date this method of functioning remains in place, but has been institutionalised and is becoming transparent. He ruled with the help of advisors, many of whom were from Syria, Lebanon and Egypt (Almana, 1980) and his engagement was largely based on the tribal sense of generosity, compassion and direct access to the ruler (Lipsky, 1959; Niblock, 1982). On many instances he allowed for rehabilitation of former enemies and opponents in the power structure that added to his popularity and enigma. Emerging alliances with Britain and the United States came in handy at crucial junctures of state formation and ensured the flow of modern weapons and technology (Philby, 1955; Lipsky, 1959).

Early Political Structure

The Saudi political structure had three distinct layers in the early years; the royal family formed the core, Wahhabi religious scholars (ulema), Najdi tribes (*qabail*) and Hejazi merchants (*tujjar*) formed the second layer and the third layer consisted of rest of the population (Kostiner, 1993). Beside the al-Saud members the royal family comprised of members of lateral clans such as al-Jiluwi, al-Mishari, al-Thunayyan and al-Sudairi (Lipsky, 1959). Intermarriages within these branches were common and served as an instrument to keep the clan intact. Ibn Saud took many brides from outside the immediate clan and tribe to win over allies and strengthen his rule and as a result, the composition of the royal family changed with his offspring comprising the core within al-Saud while the lateral branches were pushed to the periphery (Khoury and Kostiner, 1990).

The second layer consisted of Wahhabi ulema, a strong ally of the royal family who had provided the religious legitimacy to the expansion of their rule. They largely belonged to the al-Shaikh family (descendants of Wahhab) and their links with al-Saud had

[5] A number of *majlis* were part of the daily schedule of the King for various purposes and duration such as the *Majlis Aam* (public congregation), *Majlis Khas* (congregation with close associates) and *Majlis Dars* (congregation with ulema); for further reading see: George A. Lipsky (1959); Mohammed Almana (1980); and Madawi Al-Rasheed (2010).

strengthened through intermarriages (Bligh, 1985; Commins, 2006; Wynbrandt, 2010). The ulema ensured Wahhabi ideals in public life as a "major prop of government" and as important component of the checks and balances (Lipsky, 1959: 45). In the initial years of the state, they opposed introduction of any technology or system that was remotely linked to the West such as railways, telegraph, motor vehicles, modern education, banking system etc. Indeed, the ulema were opposed to allowing oil exploration by the 'infidels' but Ibn Saud countered them through political manoeuvres and theological arguments and the opposition to the introduction of modern technology slowly diminished particularly after increase in oil wealth which also benefitted the religious leaders. Thus, rather than blindly opposing everything Western, the ulema became selective (Yizraeli, 2012: 24-25). The nature of the al-Saud-ulema relationship, its composition and relative influence have evolved over time, though the clergy maintains its position in power structure (discussed in detail in Chapter Seven).

Another important component of the second layer of political structure was the tribes; some of whom were supportive of the conquests since the days of first and second Saudi states, while others had to give in due to Ibn Saud's growing power. Tribal leaders (*amir*) were generously rewarded by Ibn Saud for their support and in the process they became an important intermediary between the royal family and the people at large (Khoury and Kostiner, 1990). Indeed tribes functioned as the most important unit of social and political authority in the Arabian Peninsula even before it was politically administered in a territorial sense (Lipsky, 1959). The territorial unification under al-Saud changed their role but not their significance. Tribal custom of authority previously meant autonomy and economic inter-dependence but after formation of the Kingdom the tribes were made subservient to authority of al-Saud and functioned as "an administrative entity of central political control" (ibid: 106).

Hejazi merchants formed the third component of the second layer. They were a late entrant as they allied with al-Saud only after the conquest of Hejaz in the mid-1920s. As long as oil revenues remained meagre, they wielded economic power and hence significant influence in the political structure. The alliance was mutual; the royal family allowed them to flourish by offering security and political patronage and in return the latter helped in keeping the state finances functioning through taxes, levies and

donations (Lipsky, 1959; Niblock, 1982). As oil revenues increased, their political relevance diminished. Nevertheless, prominent Hejazi merchant families such as Mahfouz, Kaki, Subeaei, Jamjoom, Khoja and others continue to have a stake in the economy and play important roles in public institutions such as chambers of commerce, universities, hospitals, municipal corporation and public affairs in the Hejaz region (Wilson and Graham, 1994).

Until the 1940s, changes in core and second layers of the political structure were the result of new sources of wealth, and political alignments and realignments. The third layer, that is, the wider population, remained largely unaffected by these changes as they remained out of the purview of distribution of wealth and had no access to resources. They continued to depend on traditional modes for economic sustenance and it was only the changes in the next phase that started to impact them due to the newly established oil industry.

Signs of socio-political transformation were noticeable during the 1950s after substantial influx of oil revenues (Niblock, 1982). A number of factors including oil and Arabian American Oil Company (ARAMCO), regional political upheavals and factionalism within the royal family were responsible for some immediate problems and the ushering in of socio-political transformation. Since the late 1940s oil revenues began impacting various aspects of the socioeconomic life and a new class of people started to emerge centred around the oil industry which in turn affected the structures in the society (Lipsky, 1959; Wenner, 1975). The oil industry became the driving force behind the emergence of infrastructure and besides direct employment for scores of Saudis it also created opportunities for small businesses in the petroleum-related service industry. The period also witnessed tumultuous political changes in the region, especially following the rise of secular Arab nationalism, pan-Arabism and socialism. The emergence of Gamal Abdul Nasser in Egypt created ripples inside Saudi Arabia as labour unions and mobilisation of workers in the petroleum industry led to a number of strikes in the mid-1950s causing panic among the al-Saud leadership (Lipsky, 1959).

Regional Turbulences and Impacts

The earliest calls for political reforms can also be traced to the early 1950s when local and regional dynamics led to the formation of opposition groups such as the Front of National Reform (FNR) which incidentally coincided with oil workers' strike in the Eastern Province in October 1953 (Wynbrandt, 2010: 212). The emergence of a small working class associated with the oil industry resulted in the Kingdom witnessing some labour movements and activism by workers belonging to ARAMCO. Though political parties and groups with slightest political agenda were prohibited, demands for reforms inspired by Nasser's call for republican state received some attention in the Eastern Province and Hejaz region. The 1953 strike was followed with another one in 1956 and alarmed the monarchy that perceived these protests as a precursor for demands for power sharing. Not prepared for any political opening, it clamped down on such trade union activities (Vassiliev, 1998; Bronson, 2006). Around the same time, some senior military officials were detained for possible coup attempts similar to those witnessed in Egypt (July 1952) and later in Iraq (July 1958) and unnerved the al-Saud. President Nasser visited Saudi Arabia in 1956 and received rousing welcome among the oil-industry workers further making the al-Saud uneasy (Abir, 1993).

At the same time, because of the tribal nature of the Saudi society, barring a few incidents and minor activities, political awareness was confined to small section of newly educated workers and professionals and chances for a wider, well-organised political activism or military intervention was remote. As reminded by Saudi social anthropologist Madawi al-Rasheed, "With the exception of Prince Talal (one of the sons of Ibn Saud and leader of Free Princes) and his royal entourage, dissident came from the newly educated Saudis in a society that still cherished descent and tribal origin" (2010: 109). King Saud had become suspicious of rising popularity of the idea of Arab nationalism inside the Kingdom and after initially supporting Nasser and engaging with Egypt in friendly manner, he distanced from Egyptian rhetoric.

The 1950s and 1960s were also witness to strong rivalry within the ruling family and for a while it became a theatre of intense political contestations. By late 1950s three distinct factions had emerged within the al-Saud; one led by King Saud was the vanguards of the old system and was largely termed as 'conservatives'. The second faction led by

Crown Prince Faisal (who became King in 1964) was ‘progressive’ and wanted a change in approach of the governance and its main concern was the growing restlessness among the population over misappropriation of the wealth by members of the royal family. The third faction led by Prince Talal known as ‘Free Princes’ was articulating the need for abolishment of the monarchy and complete restructuring of the political system. Inspired by the changing political situation in the region, this faction had a limited support within the family or the larger population except among a small liberal-reformist section (Yizraeli, 1997; Kèchichian, 2001; Wynbrandt, 2009; Al-Rasheed, 2010). The contestation continued until 1964 when Saud was eventually forced to abdicate in favour of Faisal while the ‘Free Princes’ were rehabilitated after the decline of Nasser and pan-Arabism in the wake of the Arab defeat in the June 1967 War with Israel.

King Faisal was the architect of the idea of pan-Islamism to counter the tide of pan-Arabism which culminated in the formation of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC; renamed Organisation of Islamic Cooperation in 2011) in 1969 consisting Muslim-dominated countries of the world and the leadership of the Arab-Muslim world moved from Egypt to Saudi Arabia that was further consolidated following the oil crisis of 1973 and the end of the Cold War (see Chauvin, 2010).

Under Faisal things started to take a different shape; he tactically avoided debate on politics and focussed on economic development through a ten-point programme pledging a “sustained endeavour to develop the country’s resources and economy” (Niblock, 1982: 100). He emphasised on religious piety in public life and his calls for global Islamism resonated within the Saudi socio-political life (Buchan, 1982; Niblock, 1982; Niblock, 2006). He was the architect of planned development and through political manoeuvres kept together all stakeholders in the system. Political reforms were not his priority but the changing economic pattern affected political structure leading to some change in the composition of the elites (Kéchichian, 2008). In the process, the core of the system became more condensed and the second layer widened with inclusion of new business, religious and professional elites. Social organisations were affected with increased urbanisation leading to decline in the tribal structure and rise of new educated middle classes (Rugh, 1973; Makki, 2011).

Changes in the Political Structure

In spite of the lack of political reforms, structures and patterns of interaction between various groups in the system evolved over time. The political elite expanded; influence of tribal *amirs*, ulema and Hejazi merchants declined due the emergence of oil industry and the consequent rise of new bureaucracy consisting mostly of technocrats, businessmen, industrialists, educationists and bankers, who largely came from Najdi families closely allied with the al-Saud (Stanslie, 2011). Religion became the only avenue for social mobility and political ascendance and hence many younger Wahhabi ulema from non-elite families and remote areas such as Asir, Qassim, and even Hasa and Hail exploited this space and gained prominence (Lacroix, 2005, 2011). The conditions witnessed new entrants and non-Wahhabi ulema, non-Najdi tribes and non-Hejazi merchants managed to climb the social ladder due to increased prosperity, and in the process gained access to thresholds of power. Therefore, by early 1960s the expanse of political elites became multi-layered and did not remain linear, and education and urbanisation were the most important factors for such non-linear expansion without, however, weakening the political structure or power equation of al-Saud and its allies (Fandy, 1999).

Faisal who was instrumental in stabilising and overhauling the government structure (Kéchichian, 2008) took planned steps to avoid backlash from either within the family or the larger population due to lack of political opening. For example, he assigned his brothers various roles in state functions by appointing them to important positions. Khalid was appointed Crown Prince in 1964 and Fahd was made Interior Minister in 1962 and later in 1967 was promoted to Second Deputy Prime Minister effectively putting him second in the line of succession. In 1962, while Sultan was made Defence Minister, Abdullah was given the responsibility for National Guard. It was done to share the state machinery among the family to avoid feud over succession and to give his half-brothers stakes in stability of the al-Saud rule.

Formal political system, however, remained rudimentary and was run with the help of traditional methods and institutions. The monarchy was not willing to share power and three principal branches of governance, namely, legislature, executive and judiciary continued to be under the control of the ruling family on the basis of religious edicts and

historical claims. Amidst the tension within the ruling family King Saud had promised a *Majlis al-Shura* (Consultative Council) in 1962 but this was realised only in 1993 in the wake of regional political upheavals following the Kuwait crisis (1990-91).

The modern amenities without a lack of representative institutions has made some scholars depict Saudi Arabia as an ‘authoritarian’ and ‘absolute’ monarchy that relies on religion, kinship and wealth for legitimacy without political participation (Halliday, 1975; Humphreys, 1979; Jones, 2010). Such explanation has been countered by others who argue that despite being based on traditional criterions, the functioning of the state is far from ‘authoritarian’ and that the monarchy is subjected to strong checks and balances, mainly the *shari’a*, the ulema, the royal family and tribal allies (Rugh, 1979; Khory and Kostiner, 1990). The system continues to be based on traditional ideas and arrangements and without any scope for wider participation but allows for some consultations and debates within the closed structures and hence cannot be termed ‘authoritarian’.

The early 1970s proved to be threshold for change in terms of foreign policy and hence conducive for some movements in the political arena, especially in terms of the social base of the ruling family. The threats from pan-Arabism had subsided and the plank of pan-Islamism got a boost due to Saudi Arabia masterminding oil-embargo against the Western support to Israel during the October 1973 War. It enhanced Saudi image in the Muslim world and won new allies for pan-Islamism (Cordesman, 2003; Bronson, 2006; Jones, 2010). It also led to an unprecedented surge in revenues and huge influx of wealth. The Iran-Iraq war (1980-88) kept the oil supplies unstable and the volatility of the international oil market led to constant pouring of revenues to the Gulf monarchies, especially Saudi Arabia.

The nature of the society transformed and new classes and groups emerged in the wake of influx of oil-wealth and planned development and impacted various aspects of life including demography, social structure as well as increased level of education (Ramady, 2005; Niblock, 2006; Niblock and Malik, 2007). Even though, oil-wealth led to economic developments and change in social structure and demography, political situation largely remained immune to any changes and the free cradle-to-grave services

precluded any popular demands for political openness let alone reforms. In fact regional developments in Iran and Afghanistan and their impact on the domestic politics hardened the regime's position regarding political participation or introduction of representative institutions.

Islamic Revolution and Impacts

In the late 1970s Saudi Arabia faced a number of internal and external crises that impacted its domestic situation and polity. Foremost was the fall of Shah of Iran on 11 February 1979 and the Islamic revolution, which posed a challenge for the monarchies in the Gulf including al-Saud. Ayatollah Khomeini's calls for 'export' of the revolution mocked the authority of the ruling families, created tension in the system and inspired occasional violence in the region (Kostiner, 2009). The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December the same year resulted in Saudi involvement in anti-Soviet mujahedeen activities. Saudi Arabia sending Jihadi fighters including Osama bin Laden to Afghanistan was counterproductive. When these battle-hardened Jihadis (commonly referred to as Afghan Arabs) returned after the Soviet withdrawal in 1989, they turned against their former benefactors accusing them of betrayal against Islam by stationing foreign 'infidel' and women troops in the Kingdom during the Kuwait crisis (Hegghammer, 2010).

In the domestic arena, the serious challenge came in the form of the siege of Kaaba in 1979, which was partly inspired if not influenced by the Islamic revolution in Iran. Along with hundreds of his armed supporters on 20 November, Juhaiman al-Utaibi, who graduated from Islamic University in Medina and a former student of Abdulaziz bin Abdullah bin Baz (popularly known as Sheikh Bin Baz, who became Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia in 1993) took over the Kaaba and *al-Masjid al-Haram* (the Mosque surrounding Kaaba) and declared his brother-in-law Muhammad bin Abdullah al-Qahtani as *Mahdi*.[6] They were part of a movement called *al-Jama` al-Salafiya al-Muhtasiba* (Salafi Group for Hisba; observance of Islamic practices) established around mid-1970s that rejected the traditional Islamic jurisprudence and argued for literal

[6] Mahdi is understood to be the Messiah who will redeem Islam from evil forces before the Day of Judgment. Though it has no references in Quran, mentions are found in Hadith. Similar prophesies are found in other monotheistic religions, for further reading see: Yehoiakin ben Ya'ocov (2012).

reading of Islamic scriptures. The seizure continued for nearly three weeks and the Kaaba was retrieved only with the help of Pakistani army and French paratroopers (Hegghammer and Lacroix, 2007; Trofimov, 2008).

Amidst the siege al-Utaibi published and distributed his ideas in *Sabah Rasail (Seven Letters)*, which were published and circulated within and outside Saudi Arabia despite prohibitory orders. Inter alia, he demanded:

- The imperative to emulate the Prophet's example, revelation, propagation, and military takeover.
- The necessity for the Muslims to overthrow their present corrupt rulers who are forced upon them and lack Islamic attributes since the Quran recognizes no king or dynasty.
- The requirements for legitimate rulership are devotion to Islam and its practice, rulership by the Holy Book and not by repression, *Quraishi tribal roots*, and election by the Muslim believers. (emphasis added)
- The duty to base the Islamic faith on the Quran and the *sunnah* and not on the equivocal interpretation (*taqlid*) of the *ulama* and on their "incorrect" teachings in the schools and universities.
- The necessity to isolate oneself from the sociopolitical system by refusing to accept any official positions.
- The advent of the *mahdi* from the lineage of the Prophet through Husayn ibn Ali to remove the existing injustices and bring equity and peace to the faithful.
- The duty to reject all worshipers of the partners of God (*shir*k), including worshipers of Ali, Fatimah and Muhammad, the Khawarij and even music and technology.
- The duty to establish a puritanical Islamic community which protects Islam from unbelievers and does not court foreigners (Dekmejian, 1985: 142).

These demands posed a serious challenge to the authority of al-Saud as they openly questioned the Islamic legitimacy of the regime to rule over the holy cities. Subsequently scholars argued that the siege was in the making for long and that it was a by-product of Islamism being followed by the Saudi ruling establishment (Trofimov, 1988; Al-Rasheed, 1996).

The problem was compounded by unrest among Shias in the Eastern Province that led to rioting and strikes. It continued for nearly seven days (26 November-3 December 1979) and resulted into a number of deaths. The problem had started with Shias insisting on public commemoration of Ashura (martyrdom of Hussein ibn Ali), which was prohibited by law. The insistence on taking out a procession to commemorate Ashura became a political act in the wake of the Iranian Revolution and the siege of Kaaba (Jones, 2006; Matthiesen, 2012). For decades the Shias felt marginalised as they faced cultural and religious isolation rooted in Wahhabi hatred against Shias who were

labelled heretics (Bin Baz, n.d.). Saudi cracked down on the peaceful procession sparked off violent response from the Shias and rioting spread to other Shia dominated areas such as Qatif (Jones, 2006; Matthiesen, 2012). These incidents further fuelled fear psychosis among the al-Saud regarding Shias who resented Wahhabi domination (Buchan, 1982).

Iranian calls for spread and even 'export' (Kostiner, 2009) of the Islamic revolution and its tirade against Arab Gulf monarchies caused panic among al-Saud leading to them propping Iraqi president Saddam Hussein to initiate the prolonged and ill fated Iran-Iraq War (Dietl, 1991). The monarchy also felt the need to re-emphasise its Islamic character as reflected in the move by King Fahd to adopt the title of *Khadim al-Harmain* (Custodian of Two Holy Mosques) in 1986 at the height of the war. Apart from causing deaths and destruction it pushed both regional powers to economic bankruptcy and Saddam Hussein in desperation to come out of the financial problems invaded, occupied and annexed Kuwait in August 1990 (Chubin and Tripp, 1988; Hero, 1991; and Dietl, 1991).

Kuwait Crisis and Demands for Reforms

The impact of the Kuwait crisis upon Saudi Arabia surpassed any other contemporary event. The removal of the Iraqi aggression and the liberation of Kuwait were possible because of the international coalition led by the US and the *Operation Desert Storm*. Within hours after the Iraqi invasion King Fahd after consultations with senior princes and ulema acceded (Lacey, 2009) to the US offer to help and agreed to the stationing of the American forces to protect oil fields from a possible a Kuwait-like situation in Saudi Arabia (Pollack, J., 2002).

The Saudi response to the Kuwait crisis created an internal political storm leading to many questions including the ability of the al-Saud to defend the holy places despite a huge expenditure on defence and buying weapons. The need for external help from non-Muslim 'infidel' forces and of allowing them to be stationed inside the Kingdom became a major embarrassment for the ruling family (Dekmejian, 2003). It was not just a matter of asking for American help but from a non-Muslim force that also comprised of Jews and women combatants and this offended many sensibilities. It proved to be

even more harmful than the use of foreign forces to end the siege of Kaaba in 1979 because that was an 'Islamic' cause and al-Saud was successful in portraying the siege as violation of the sacred place. In the case of Kuwait, however, it was a political contestation among one Muslim ruler (Saddam Hussein) and other Muslim states. Islamists both within and outside Saudi Arabia felt that al-Saud bucked under American pressure and did not explore a peaceful and diplomatic solution for the Kuwait crisis and quickly settled for a military solution by enticing various Muslim and non-Muslim countries under the American command (Kumaraswamy, 1990; Kumaraswamy, 1991).

Severest criticisms of the Saudi handling of the Kuwait crisis came from the Islamists. It gave the newly formed al-Qaeda (1988-89), an organisation formed under the leadership of Osama bin Laden comprising mainly of the Afghan-Arabs, a strong focus to undermine the al-Saud rule. Bin Laden had reportedly offered the services of the al-Qaeda to fight against the Iraqi army but was rejected by the al-Saud (Jehl, 2001) who preferred to depend on the US and allowed stationing of US forces in the holy land. This enraged Bin Laden who articulated the need to liberate the holy lands from the 'infidel' forces (Hegghammer, 2010). The stationing of US forces was unacceptable to the Islamists and Jihadists primarily due to its religious implications and for them it was tantamount to 'occupation' of the holy places. For the Islamists it undermined the sanctity of the Mecca and Medina and also denigrated the 'purity' of the Arabian Peninsula that had remained free from 'non-Muslim' occupation for fourteen centuries (ibid).

In one of his open letters to Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia, Abdulaziz ibn Baz (Bin Baz), in 1994, Osama bin Laden (Bin Laden) articulated al-Qaeda's commitments to Islam, the Mulism *ummah* and Islamic holy lands including in Palestine and criticised him for his *fatwas* justifying the stationing of 'infidel' American forces. He admonished him for justifying all the actions of the al-Saud that violated the sanctity of the holy places and his *fatwa* against Sahwa leaders such as Salman al-Awdah and Safar al-Hawali who criticised the Saudi response to the Kuwait crisis (Bin Laden, 1994). The stationing of American forces on Saudi soil was unacceptable as it 'compromised' the sovereignty of a Muslim territory and was economically exploitative as it enforced "expensive arm deals on the Saudi state" (Heghammer, 2010: 104).

Other Islamists including neo-Wahhabis and Sahwis were also critical of the Saudi response as they saw it as compromising the sanctity of the Holy land and the Holy mosques and raised doubts over the ability of al-Saud to defend them. They questioned the legitimacy of the al-Saud who cannot defend its people, resources and territory without the help of 'infidel' forces. While they questioned the legitimacy of the move to allow stationing of the US forces in Saudi Arabia, unlike the jihadist, they did not call for overthrow of the monarchy and settled for calling on the ruler to rectify the mistakes by immediately expelling the US forces and bringing reforms in social, political and security structures. The Islamists criticised the liberal-reformists for supporting the regime, challenged their tactics and disapproved Bin Baz for sanctifying the stationing of foreign troops (Al-Rasheed, 1996; Lacroix, 2004).

This was an unprecedented challenge for the al-Saud; the only other time voices from within had called for such drastic changes was when the 'Free Princes' demanded the abolition of the monarchy in the 1960s. Their support base was thin and hence could be easily dismissed. This time the critics had a wider support manifested by popularity of the opposition figures (Ehteshami, 2003) because the critics were resting their argument on the same Islamic sources that are the principal source of legitimacy for the al-Saud and was difficult to counter let alone thwart. Public perception was not entirely in favour of the al-Saud, particularly because it was a question of fighting another Muslim ruler and invitation to foreign troops was seen as a weakness. If status quo could not be maintained, reforming the system was not possible as it meant power sharing and loss of monopoly on authority. It was under these circumstances that the regime patronized and allowed, if not initiated the petition movement, whose form and contents needed prior approval (International Crisis Group, 2004).

The 'petition fever' began in Kuwait and soon spread to Saudi Arabia and other Arab Gulf States. Between 1990 and 1991 two well orchestrated petitions were submitted to King Fahd by liberals and Islamists (Al-Rasheed, 1996). Key political demands included reviewing ties with the US, political opening, introduction of constitution and an 'elected' legislative council (Dekmejian, 2003; Raphaeli, 2005). Major socio-economic demands of these petitions were improvement in the conditions of women, education reforms, creation of jobs and religious and cultural rights for Shias.

The first signs of protests could be noticed in September when about 70 women defied the prevailing driving ban and drove their cars pressing for lifting the ban. This rebellious action was partly the result of them noticing the presence of American women soldiers in combat uniform and them driving, “a symbolic act prompted by the heady atmosphere of liberalisation and the presence of Western media and military personnel” (Dekmejian, 2003: 403). The protest, however, enraged the conservative constituency who were already perturbed by the presence of ‘infidel’ American forces on Saudi soil (Heghammer, 2010). One of the earliest petitions signed by 43 liberal-reformist intellectuals was submitted to the King in December 1990, weeks before the *Operation Desert Storm* and demanded “codification of Islamic law that would provide for fundamental reforms, ...” and a consultative council and judicial reforms (Dekmejian, 2003: 403). The pace of such moves increased after the liberation of Kuwait in February 1991 and a few more petitions were submitted to the King.

Islamist Opposition

Groups with divergent goals raising voices against the monarchy and its policies reflected troubled political conditions that later led to formation of *Committee for the Defence of Legitimate Rights* (CDLR) and other lesser known outfits. The crucial months also witnessed debate between the liberal-reformist intellectuals such as Ghazi Algosaibi who defended the stationing of foreign troops and the neo-Wahhabi ulema such as Nasir al-Umar who opposed the move and criticised the regime and the reformists (Dekmejian, 2003; Lacroix, 2004).

Partly in response to the demands for reforms and to deflect the debate around stationing of American troops, King Fahd initiated a number of measures. The most important of these was the Basic Law of governance (*al-Nizam al-Asasi*) issued on 1 March 1992. Coming six decades after the founding of the Kingdom, it declared Quran to be the constitution (Basic Law, 1992). Simultaneously, it was announced that a nominated Consultative Council (*Majlis al-Shura*) and elected municipal councils would be established. A 60-member *Majlis al-Shura* was established in August 1993 and its number was increased to 90 in 1997 and 120 in 2001 and since 2005 its membership stands at 150. The first elections for municipal councils took place in between February and April 2005 in which women and military personnel were

excluded from voting. The Islamists did not appreciate even these measures and continued "pressing the regime to recast Saudi society according to strict Islamist tenets that would place checks on royal authority, strengthen the political position of the 'ulama' class and reorient the Kingdom's foreign and defense policies away from its special relationships with the United States" (Dekmejian, 2003: 403).

Increased demands for reforms in early 1990s gave way to muted voices by the turn of the decade mainly because some measures taken by the monarchy silenced its detractors. Simultaneously, the monarchy did not hesitate to tighten its grip on social behaviour and occasionally used force and other pressure tactics against dissent even while co-opting those willing to work within the system. Through a careful use of reform initiatives, coercion and pitting reformists and Islamists against each other, the regime "managed to gradually regain control of the internal reforms debate" (Kèchichian, 2013: 174).

While liberal-reformists largely retreated, opposition to the regime was dominated by the Islamists ranging from non-jihadi Sahwis to extremists like al-Qaeda (Dekmejian, 2003).-Islamic awakening (*al-Sahwa al-Islamiya*) movement was part of the tumultuous political activities inspired by Wahhabi and Muslim Brotherhood ideologies. Its Islamist-reformist agenda became the target of crackdown due to its increased activism and growing popularity (Fandy, 1999; Fandy, 2009). The most prominent organisation of the Sahwis was the CDLR that was formed in 1993 in Riyadh and was the first opposition group within the Kingdom to openly challenge the regime. King Fahd who faced criticisms from radical Islamists over him allowing 'infidel' troops had to curtail political activity. The CDLR which was openly critical of the regime was banned and many of its leaders including Awdah and Hawali were jailed and some of them were later released, allowed to go into exile or rehabilitated on the condition that they refrain from criticizing the monarchy (International Crisis Group, 2004; Lacroix, 2011).

From 9/11 to Arab Spring

The situation turned worse after the 11 September 2001 attacks in the United States. It forced Saudi Arabia and the world to recognise dangers posed by the Islamist extremism and forced al-Saud to review some of its domestic religious and education

policies (discussed in Chapter Seven). The Kingdom was hard-pressed to preserve its ties with the United States without inviting backlash from the conservative elements at home. In terms of domestic political situation, the incident rekindled political activities akin to the aftermath of Kuwait crisis. A number of petitions were submitted to the monarchy amidst encouraging response by Crown Prince Abdullah. In January 2003 more than 100 academics and prominent intellectuals signed a 'vision document' demanding constitutional reforms and elections for the legislative council (Kèchichian, 2013). It was followed by another petition titled *In Defence of the Nation* that was sent to the Crown Prince in September 2003 which, among others, was signed by 51 prominent Saudi women (Raphaeli, 2005). In April 2003 a Shia delegation met Crown Prince Abdullah, submitted a petition called *Partners in One Nation* and asked for some degree of autonomy in religious practices and education (Dekmejian, 2004). Subsequently, Shias were allowed to organise public ceremony for Ashura and were granted the permission to introduce religious textbooks in primary schools (Kèchichian, 2013).

In the meantime, the Kingdom faced a slew of terror attacks orchestrated by al-Qaeda that opposed the regime and its domestic and foreign policies. Increased political activity together with dangers posed by radical Islamists forced the monarchy to initiate measures to accommodate demands for better education and job opportunities. So far as demands for political reforms were concerned, Abdullah preferred gradualism, an approach that received support of the reformist elements in the country. In the words of Saudi academic Abdualaziz O. Sager:

> A gradual, step-by-step approach is the best option to avert and appease apprehensions. Jump-starting the reform program will strengthen the credibility of the government and preclude any propensities towards violence, as reforms will already be concretely and resolutely underway. Gradual execution of reforms will also allow for more options to choose from and will preclude unpredictable developments from taking root (2004: 34).

The liberal-reformists found a strong ally in Abdullah who was acting as regent since late 1995 following a decapitating stroke suffered by King Fahd. As *de facto* ruler, Abdullah initiated reforms in areas such as education, judiciary and political participation, and took measures for improving condition of women and Shias. Initiatives such as the National Dialogue, inter-faith dialogue, municipal elections, nomination of women in the *Majlis al-Shura* and opening of new universities indicated

his intent for meaningful reforms though the pace was painfully slow (Kèchichian, 2013; Thomson, 2014).

Political demands regained some voice in the wake of the Arab Spring creating flutter and gave rise to reiteration of earlier demands for reforms. King Abdullah treaded a cautious line by balancing reforms such as increased participation of women in workforce and nominating them in the *Majlis al-Shura* and taking steps to curb the powers of religious police. At the same time, he did not lift the ban on women driving and cracked down on liberal and reformist activists as was evident from the trial, conviction and imprisonment of human rights campaigners Abdullah al-Hamid and Muhammad al-Qahtani (Amnesty International, 2014) and liberal blogger Raef al-Badawi (*The Guardian*, 2015). The regime also cracked down on Shia demonstrators and Wahhabi radicals who were critical of the pace of reform; one was complaining of the slow pace and other felt the reforms were against Islamic principles. Its response has been a combination of limited political accommodation, economic largesse and strong security measures even while opposing large-scale reforms including demands from Prince Talal for a constitutional monarchy (see Allam and England, 2010).

Thus, the monarchical system established in 1932 remains stable despite evolution in the political structure and numerous challenges. Political space continues to be limited to traditional ways and methods, and the monarchy has ruled on the basis of its historical legitimacy and by introducing economic and administrative modernisation.

Economic Modernisation

A number of studies have explored the intricate relationship between economic growth and political economy and its effect on the Saudi society (Ibrahim, 1982; Niblock, 1982; Niblock, 2006; Jones, 2010). The economic modernisation has made an immense impact on various aspects of life including demographic changes, social norms and behaviour, condition of women as well as the role of ulema. At the time of foundation of the Kingdom, the need for restructuring of the economy was desperately felt because political stability and legitimacy of the al-Saud rule were linked to economic welfare of the population. The need for economic development also became pressing due to the tribal nature of the society and lack of natural resources. Ibn Saud understood the

significance but was constrained due to lack of resources (Wilson, 1982; Foley, 2011). It was in this context that Ibn Saud was driven to befriend Britain and other world powers such as Russia and France (Wynbrandt, 2010: 165-166; Foley, 2011: 21-22). The arrangement with Britain was not due to political compulsions and military strategy alone, but had a strong economic component (see Troeller, 1976; Leatherdale, 1983; Silverfarb, 1983; and Kostiner, 1993).

Early Financial Problems

Within the first decade, economic constraints and deficient resources had started to hurt the al-Saud rule that was already facing problems from neighbouring rulers who were alarmed by its rise. Due to World War I and involvement of the world powers, a number of economic and strategic changes were occurring in the region. The old tribal rivalries were revived as local leaders allied with rival external powers, which contributed to economic contestations. Ibn Saud needed resources to secure loyalty of neutral tribes who expected economic benefits as a quid pro quo. His resources were limited and economy was in a precarious condition to sustain the demands that had heightened due to conflicts. The solution came from the British, who wanted to maintain supremacy in the Gulf towards undermining the Ottoman interest and domination (Khan, 2007). Britain entered into agreement with the Mecca-based Hashemites who led the 1915 Arab revolt and simultaneously signed an agreement with the al-Saud to provide monetary help to the tune of £5,000, payable in gold (Troeller, 1976; Vassiliev, 1998; Vassiliev, 2013). The British aid helped the al-Saud to consolidate their rule over Najd in two ways; one, it gave Ibn Saud better arms and weapons to fight weakly-armed tribal groups; and two, it enabled him to bestow financial largesse upon tribal leaders towards securing their support and loyalty (Kostiner, 1993; Wynbrandt, 2010).

The subsequent declining interest and influence of the British Empire in the Gulf forced Ibn Saud to scot for newer resources. Political situation in the Peninsula was fast changing and he had become ambitious about unifying the entire region under his dominion. In the 1920s, al-Saud made substantial gains against its traditional rivals and took control of Hail and Hejaz regions. The conquest of Hejaz (1924-25) brought an important source of revenue—Hajj pilgrimage. Rich Hejazi merchants were another source of income as their donations and funded a number of state activities (Lipsky,

1959). Some regulations with respect to taxes were imposed to enhance al-Saud's ability to satisfy loyal tribes through financial largesse. Payments of *zakat* (*shari'a*-based religious tax levied on Muslim) and *jiziya* (*shari'a*-based tax levied on non-Muslims) were regulated and some levies and duties were imposed on imports and exports to improve state revenues, in which Hejazi merchants substantially contributed. In addition, Ibn Saud had procured loans through his close aide Abdullah Sulayman from various banking and commercial enterprises such as Eastern Telegraph Company, Gellatly Hankey, Sharqieh Ltd and others to sustain Kingdom's expenses. As evident from Jeddah report (1930), in November 1920 the government was in debt to the tune of £120,000 (cited in Sluglett and Farouk-Sluglett, 1982).

Despite increased financial resources and British subsidy, the economy in the early 1930s was facing hardships. The newly proclaimed Kingdom was under severe financial predicament; it had accumulated debt, creditors had refused further finances and external loans had become nearly impossible due to declining capability and interest of the British (Wynbrandt, 2010: 187). The state expense had continued to rise, while revenues were stagnating and the Great Depression and later World War II adversely affected Hajj pilgrims leading to a drastic drop in pilgrimage-driven revenues. Earlier, after taking control of Hejaz, al-Saud had ensured security for the pilgrims which had led to increase in their numbers. For example, in 1925 the number of overseas pilgrim was negligible but it gradually increased over the next four-five years (Foley, 2011). According to some estimates, Hajj and related income constituted 50-80 percent of the state revenues during the late 1920s and early-1930s, leading some scholars to see it as an indication of the early origins of the 'rentier model' (ibid). It had helped in lower internal taxation as well as provided replacement for British subsidies but soon the situation turned against as the number of Hajj pilgrims witnessed a steep decline owing to external factors (Bronson, 2006; Wynbrandt, 2010; Foley, 2011). It put immense constraints leading to pressure on expenses including financial largesse and generous expenses on buying support of the tribal leaders, maintenance of the army and payment of salaries of the growing government staff.

Discovery of Oil

It was under these circumstances of financial stress and despite opposition from religious sections, Ibn Saud allowed oil exploration inside the Kingdom. Petroleum that would change the fate of the Gulf region had not become a priced commodity in international market and its strategic importance had not been recognised. The agreement between Standard Oil of California (SOCAL) and the Kingdom to allow petroleum exploration brought a much needed financial relief and the King granted a concession to the SOCAL on 29 May 1933 after it had discovered oil in Bahrain the previous year and this he did on the advice of his close confident Ameen Rihani and British officer St. John Philby, who favoured the SOCAL in return of financial benefits (Lipsky, 1959; Bronson, 2006). According to the agreement, the SOCAL paid interest free loan of £50,000 in two instalments in addition to annual payment of £5,000 and were allowed to explore petroleum in the Eastern Province and "Saudi Arabia agreed to pay back the loan in future oil revenue if it ever materialized" (Bronson, 2006: 17).

SOCAL formed a subsidiary namely California-Arabian Standard Oil Company (CASOC) to explore oil in the Kingdom. Oil was discovered in 1935 but CASOC was facing difficulties on many fronts including investments and lack of avenues to sell the oil in international market, thus, it merged with Texas Oil in 1936. Commercial production started in 1938 when large quantities of petroleum were drilled from Dammam-7 well located near Dhahran, producing more than 1,500 barrels per day (Safran, 1988; Bronson, 2006). In 1944, the subsidiary was renamed Arab American Oil Company (ARAMCO) and as it turned out, this became the foundation stone for the US-Saudi relations that continues until now despite ups and downs (Cordesman, 2003; Bronson, 2006; and Gause, 2011).

Though state revenues improved, the general economic condition was ridden in poverty and hardships. Distribution of financial resources was unequal and many particularly those engaged in traditional modes of production such as agriculture, farming, pastoralism and handicrafts could not benefit due to lack of accessibility or due to them aligning with rivals of al-Saud (Niblock, 1982). The generous distribution of wealth that Ibn Saud had adopted to consolidate the rule stretched the treasury. The task to improve administration put pressure as number of employees engaged had increased. In fact

during late 1920s and early 1930s payment of salaries to government staff was usually delayed up to six months (Sluglett and Farouk-Sluglett, 1982). Threats from rival families had not completely diminished, which required continuous expenses on enhancing military prowess.

The period between establishment of the Kingdom, discovery of oil in 1935 and commercial production in 1938 was not easy and Ibn Saud was facing numerous constraints and financial dilemmas, even the CASOC was faced with hardships (Bronson, 2006; Yergin, 2008). In the words of Rachel Bronson, "The 1938 oil discovery and subsequent finds shocked and delighted King Abdel Aziz" and the first royalty that the Kingdom received from oil supplies was US$1.5 million (Bronson, 2006: 19). It boosted the faltering finances that started to look better with subsequent supplies but it was not enough to completely revamp the economic structures. The problem was compounded by the beginning of World War II that affected both oil production and Saudi Arabia's economy. Arguably, the available financial resources eased the burden on treasury but it did not lead to improvement in general economic conditions (Niblock, 1982).

Economic and financial problems continued despite increasing oil revenues, and the situation came to head due to family rivalry after the death of Ibn Saud in 1953 and economic conditions had began to look precarious (Niblock, 1982). The country also suffered due to external debts that were one of the reasons for tensions between Saud and Faisal (Yizraeli, 1997; Yizraeli, 2012). In fact, the Kingdom had remained in debt and faced budgetary problems despite massive rise in revenues because of lack of coordination between changing economic requirements and existing financial system. The situation became unmanageable during Saud's reign (1953-64) because of political problems as well as his misplaced priorities that affected government finances to the extent that Saudi Riyal had to be devalued in 1958 (Zuhur, 2011). Tim Niblock argues that "The increased level of imports made possible by the revenues, coupled with the failure to devote funds to strengthening the productive base of the economy, affected detrimentally large sectors of the economy – especially agriculture, pastoralism and handicrafts" (Niblock, 1982: 77).

The financial situation had become so bleak that in 1958, when Faisal took over the responsibility of the government as prime minister, the treasury had only 317 Riyals available in cash and the banks had refused to provide credit due to earlier debts (Lipsky, 1959). This was the time when Faisal started to counter Saud's policies and eventually removed him as King in 1964. By the late 1960s, the economy had started to show signs of improvement but the Kingdom was facing a number of internal and external problems. Newer political challenges were emerging in the form of religious and secular groups (Niblock, 1982; Buchan, 1982) and regional problems, especially in neighbouring Yemen and rise of Nasser had posed threats for the al-Saud. Wealth needed to be disbursed to emphasise on the generosity of the ruler but geographic and climatic conditions were not conducive for large scale agriculture. Industrialisation and service sector were not yet on the horizon

By this time, however, the petroleum industry had made lasting impact on the Saudi socioeconomic situation. In the words of George Lipsky, the Saudi economy immediately after oil-production started can be explained:

> ...in terms of the explosive impact of the oil wealth on an arid and impoverished country whose leaders did not have the fiscal and monetary techniques to handle an immense income nor plans for putting the income to uses which would offer material benefits to the largest number of people. The only philosophy of state control or welfare was expressed through the simple traditional obligations of the ruler, and the population initially did not expect of the king anything beyond these goals (Lipsky, 1959: 150).

A significant aspect of the beginning of commercial production of oil was the lessening dependence on Hajj revenues. Though it remained important, gradually earnings from petroleum became the mainstay of state revenues. In the late 1940s and early 1950s oil constituted as much as 85-90 percent of the government's revenues (Lipsky, 1959). It was during this period that a host of commercial activities around the oil industry began leading to decline in dependence on agriculture and farming activities even though a large section of the population continued with traditional activities for sustenance. In fact "at-least three-fourth of the population" continued to be engaged in traditional activities such as "farming and animal husbandry" (ibid: 149). The period also witnessed expansion in the government administration and beginning of infrastructural development. Oil income ensured the continuation of the policy to keep taxation to minimum while gave impetus to trade activities. It also boosted the rentier model

whereby the traditional alliances were reinforced and new supporters aligned with the al-Saud (Lipsky, 1959; Bronson, 2006).

Oil revenues enabled al-Saud to indulge in disbursement of funds and subsidise services and supplies, which in turn strengthened the 'rentier model'. It served the purpose of consolidating the al-Saud rule but this indulgence did not allow for spending and investments in economic modernisation. The monarchy did not strategise a model that will lead to self-sustained and long-term methods for improving economic conditions. It lacked "fiscal and monetary techniques" to handle huge wealth, neither it had the ability to plan investments and measures for long-term economic development (Lipsky, 1959; Bronson, 2006). It took some time for al-Saud to recognise the importance of planned model of economic development and financial organisation. According to George Lipsky, till the mid-1950s Saudi government had "sponsored no productive investment under any long-range development plan" (Lipsky, 1959: 149). State finances were mainly invested in building palaces for the King and princes, purchase of foreign goods and acquiring luxury for the ruling family and those who had close links to it. Among the wider population the benefit was limited to those who engaged in the peripheral work around the oil-industry that had transformed the Eastern Province into the new economic hub, which had till then largely remained impoverished settlements of date farmers around oases and fishermen and divers engaged in pearling activities along the Gulf coast (*Al-Sharqiya, 2*014).

The nascent oil-industry made deep impacts on the socio-economic conditions and affected both the traditional modes of sustenance and social interaction. Migration from rural areas towards the newly established towns around the oil-industry in Eastern Province was the early signs of times to come. It affected farming and animal husbandry and demands for traditional trading commodities such as horses, camels, pearls and dates declined. Pearling and other maritime activities along the Gulf too were affected (Lipsky, 1959; Wenner, 1975; Niblock, 1982). Despite a general lack of planning, trade and commerce around the oil-industry had started to flourish. Commercial activities were confined to the newly emerged townships around oil industry in Eastern Province, and largely the traditional merchant families benefitted from the opportunities created. Some new entrants too established businesses leading to change in their economic

condition. Eastern Province became a commercial centre and witnessed changes in the social structure and impacts on the demography due to urbanisation (discussed in Chapter Four). However, this transformation did not benefit the majority Shia population in the area because the al-Saud looked at them with suspicious due to their history support to rival families and sectarian divisions. Hence, they were deliberately kept out of the newly emerged oil industry and allied services. They felt marginalised as only the manual and unskilled jobs were accorded to them while the higher paid jobs and business contracts went to the minority Sunni families and those who had migrated from the Najd region (Al-Rasheed, 1998; Jones, 2010).

Financial Re-organisation

Saudi Arabia embarked on an economic modernisation programme only in the late 1950s when financial crisis resurfaced due to mismanagement of funds and stagnation in revenues (Lipsky, 1959). Economic reforms were introduced due to financial compulsions and in order to sustain the generous 'welfare' measures that have been formed to enhance political legitimacy. With changing times and increased interaction with the outside world where the business and economic model were fairly advanced, al-Saud had started to recognise that the existing situation was no more tenable (Wilson, 1982). Thus, some plans were made to improve the system. The ruler encouraged private players to invest and develop the economic and financial structures and also took measures to develop institutions to monitor economic development. The Saudi Arabian Monetary Agency (SAMA) was established in 1952 laying the foundation for a fiscal system. King Saud initiated some measures to streamline the finances and removed Abdullah Sulayman and appointed Muhammad al-Sabban to head the finance ministry. Financial restructuring also included streamlining government functioning and King Saud tried to bring accountability through centralisation, accounting and auditing but these measures did not help the situation much and the condition continued to deteriorate leading to problems within the al-Saud (Lipsky, 1959). Plans for improvement in finance and economy were hampered due to family feud. Between 1958 and 1964 the finance ministry witnessed six ministers including Talal (to appease the liberal faction among the royal family) (Zuhur, 2011), Saud's son Muhammad and

younger half-brother Nawwaf for brief periods (MoF, 2013b) and thereby becoming the main ground of contestations in the ruling family.

After some years of tensions, Saud was declared senile and removed and Crown Prince Faisal took over the reign in November 1964. He started urgent measures to develop financial system and improve the economic structures but most importantly organised the system of disbursal of funds among the members of the ruling family to avoid feuds and prevent corruptions (Niblock, 1982). Faisal issued a ten-point development programme promising a "sustained endeavour to develop the country's resources and economy, in particular roads, water resources, heavy and light industry, and self-sufficient agriculture" (Niblock, 1982: 100). This was the blueprint that was followed with earnestness in the years to come paving the way for sustained economic growth.

Banking sector was in urgent need for expansion and restructuring and was remarkably inadequate till the late 1950s. Apart from the National Commercial Bank (est. 1938), only a few foreign banks such as *Banque de l'Indochine*, *Netherlands Trading Society* etc were operating, that too in a limited manner (Lipsky, 1959). *British Bank* started functioning in 1950 from Jeddah and Khobar (Wilson, 1982; Wilson, 2007). In 1957, as businesses and commercial activities started to grow, the *Riyadh Bank* was established but it faced problem due to lack of experience and SAMA intervened when it sought fast expansion (ibid). This prompted the government to bring banking regulations and in 1966 the Banking Control Law was introduced. It laid down the rules and regulations for banks, for example it forbid lending to officials and employees of the same bank and investment in company stocks to the excess of 10 percent were prohibited (Royal Decree, 1966). SAMA played a greater role as the central bank and gradually more banks were allowed with condition to not engage in *riba* (interest) to avoid backlash from the ulema (Wilson, 1982; Wilson, 2007).

By the early 1970s financial situation started to improve, financial and banking sectors were functional while oil-revenues had continued to grow. During 1970-73, Saudi Arabia had earned SR70 billion (approximately US$17.5 billion) in oil revenues that constituted nearly 90 percent of its GDP for the same period (SAMA, 2012). Therefore, before the 1973 oil boom and the subsequent development Faisal had put in place

financial and economic structures. The oil boom provided the impetus and abundance of wealth to realize the modernisation and growth of the economy and marked the beginning of a new era in economic modernisation and the Kingdom witnessed rapid and unprecedented economic growth.

Saudi economy grew exponentially in the 1970s and 1980s. For example, the GDP of Saudi Arabia was SR22.5 billion (US$5.75 billion) in 1970, it grew to SR163.6 billion (US$41 billion) in 1975 and reached SR546.6 billion (US$137 billion) in 1980 (SAMA, 2012). It was the rise in oil-revenues that propelled this growth; the Kingdom earned a total of SR7.1 billion (US$1.8 billion) in oil revenues in 1970 and this rose to SR93.5 billion (US$23.5 billion) in 1975 and SR391.3 billion (US$98 billion) in 1980 (SAMA, 2012). The rise in oil-revenues was a direct result of 1973 oil embargo that Faisal masterminded against the Western support to Israel in the October 1973 War. It was during 1970s and 180s that fast improvements were witnessed in infrastructure coupled with rapid industrialisation.

Industrialisation and Planned Development

The first step towards industrial growth was the establishment of Saudi Industrial Development Fund in 1974 (SIDF, 2013). The Kingdom established industrial cities such as Jubail and Yanbu (Zuhur, 2011). Government support was crucial at the initial stages of industrial development, which was provided in the 1970s and included incentives, construction of industrial areas, improvement in road-transport network, infrastructural development as well as capital injection. In the later period, private players were encouraged to develop industries and establish factories to manufacture necessary goods. These efforts helped in realisation of industrial growth to some extent; for example, Saudi Arabia had only 198 factories all over the country in 1974 including textile, beverages, publishing etc and in 2011 it reached 5,000 (SIDF, 2013).

The most important industry was petrochemicals that was aligned to oil-industry. Efforts at establishing a petrochemical industry had begun in the 1960s and the General Petroleum and Mineral Organisation was established in 1962 to undertake hydrocarbon projects but due to technological, manpower and financial constraints, it did not witness much growth till mid-1970s (Hambleton, 1982). Efforts to accelerate the growth in

petrochemical industry gained momentum in the wake of the oil boom and the Saudi Basic Industries Corporation (SABIC) was established in 1976. The third five-year plan (1980-85) envisaged growth in petrochemical industry and allocated huge funds for SABIC. The company grew gradually with government support and as of 2014 was the largest company after ARAMCO and produces fertilizers, polymers, petrochemicals and steel (Zuhur, 2011).

In addition to the hydrocarbon and petrochemical industries, other sectors such as fishing, service sector, real estate and construction, transportation, broadcasting and telecommunication, retail and water desalinisation witnessed growth during the 1970s. Economic modernisation efforts also aimed at diversification to balance the lop-sided growth in the oil and aligned industries but it did not earn the desired result despite a degree of success in industrialisation (Mirghani, 1986; Konrad, 1995).

Planning was an important aspect of economic growth; the Kingdom adopted five-year plan model that was in use in many developing countries. The Central Planning Organisation (CPO) had been established in 1965 to prioritise expenses and formulate development plans for different sectors. The first five-year plan (1970-75) was drawn envisaging infrastructural development and proposed energising economic growth, leading to improvement in transportation and communication systems. The second five-year plan (1975-80) focussed on developing education and training infrastructures to enhance local manpower. Third plan (1980-85) focussed on social services and health sector improvement while the fourth five-year plan (1985-90) was dedicated to economic growth and human resource development (MoEP, 2010). Earlier decades had witnessed growth but due to lack of planning and haphazard and non-systematic expansion had led to wide-ranging disparity both in terms of demographic and geographical division (Birks and Sinclair, 1982). With centralised planning the monarchy aimed to streamline and expedite economic growth (Niblock, 1982).

Economic diversification was part of planning efforts emanating from the idea to minimise dependence on unstable oil-revenues and world market fluctuations. There was also the pressure from the domestic economy to expand the base of modern sector to sustain the state structures and its welfare model (Birks and Sinclair, 1982). Saudi

Arabia "experimented with different forms of economic diversification in the industrial and agricultural sectors" (Zuhur, 2011: 141). It helped in overall growth of the economy and enhanced social services including education and healthcare and attention was given to improve agricultural production which despite being on the agenda for some time had attracted only feeble attention due to lack of resources (Jones, 2010).

Agriculture

Historically, agriculture and farming was one of the mainstays for sustenance of a large section of the population not only among the settled population but among nomads who depended on pastoral lands for grazing. Harsh climatic conditions did not allow for large scale cultivation and farming and harvest were confined to those products suitable for arid and dry climate such as dates, figs, melons, wheat, millet and barley (Zuhur, 2011). Although agriculture contributed a small fraction in Saudi economy, it remained an important source of livelihood for a large section until 1980s (30-40 percent). The sudden growth of oil and allied industries affected the traditional sectors including farming and agriculture leading to destruction of the limited farmlands, particularly in the Hasa oases. The government tried to enhance agricultural production in the 1970s, especially to produce cereals and pulses but it could not be sustained as the cost of production was higher than that of imports (Elhadj, 2004).

One of the early efforts at supporting the farm sector was the establishment of the Saudi Arabian Agriculture Bank in, 1964 to provide farmers with easy loans to encourage farming and irrigation (Jones, 2010). Saudi Arabia also invested in importing technology to enhance irrigation and improve land quality. Efforts were aimed at improving the production of cereals and vegetables so as to respond to increasing population and declining production. Subsequently, the government provided subsidies for wheat and barley production resulting in increased production; for example, wheat production reached 4 million tonnes in 1992 from merely 100,000 tonnes in 1981 (MoA, 2002) and barley production was subsidised during 1992-96 leading to growth but these measures could not be sustained due to high cost and the project to achieve food self-sufficiency had to be dropped (Elhadj, 2004; Jones, 2010).

Together with economic growth and development the ‘rentier model’ became defined and strengthened leading to a debate on its benefits and ill effects on economy and society (Herb, 1999; Luciani, 2005; Ramady, 2005; Hertog, 2007; and Qasem, 2010). During the oil boom period the ‘rentier model’ consolidated and Saudi dependence on oil increased and selling of natural resources remained the main source of state income (Qasem, 2010; Alkhathlan, 2013). Some scholars attribute this to the stability of the al-Saud rule (Beblawi, 1990; Crystal, 1990; Gause, 1994) but others articulate the need to look beyond (Fandy, 2009). Nevertheless, “Since the oil boom in the 1970s, the government has dominated the Saudi Arabian economy; the main engines behind economic growth in Saudi Arabia are oil revenues and the government spending of those revenues” (Niblock, 2006: 94). In return, the dependence of international oil market on Saudi Arabia increased; for example, it produced an average of 38 percent of total oil produced by OPEC countries during 1970-81 (Qasem, 2010). It allowed the Kingdom to invest in planning and diversification but the fluctuations in international oil-market and other instabilities made the Saudi economy volatile and dependent.

Together with the ‘rentier’ economy the welfare model too became a steady feature in the Kingdom. The government provided for all aspects of needs of the people including healthcare, education, livelihood, as well as generous subsidies in the form of pension, grants for marriage etc. This welfare system was different from the traditional definition of the term. It was intricately linked to the ‘rentier model’ whereby a proportion of the rents earned through oil sales were spent on providing cradle-to-grave services to the population without levying any tax on them. This provided legitimacy to the ruling family but at the same time relieved them from any political accountability. Thus, the ‘rentier model’, ‘welfare state’ and lack of political accountability and opening are intricately linked and has been defined by some as the ‘social contract’ that sustain the ruling families in the GCC countries (Jones, 2003; Hertog, 2009).

In the era after oil boom Saudi Arabia witnessed enormous economic changes transforming from agricultural pastoral economy to one based on industries influencing all aspects of life. Earlier, the economic transition had remained limited to small areas and to the oil-industry but the planned development, huge investments and rapid economic growth made a wider impact. Human resource development, improvement in

social services, better health and educational facilities and public services such as electricity, water supply and road-transport improved and reached all sections of society. Internal migration and urbanisation led to demographic and structural changes and made deeper behavioural and cultural impacts (discussed in Chapters Four and Five respectively). The changes in the economic structures and means of production and sustenance made a profound impact on the life of people, and even though the process had started earlier, the extent of impact after the oil boom was deeper and unprecedented (Kay, 1982).

Towards the late 1980s and early 1990s, as oil revenues came down due to price fall and slow down in world oil market and wars in the Gulf, the GDP also saw a downward turn forcing the Kingdom to start on the path of economic liberalisation (Niblock, 2006). It planned to reduce subsidies and encourage private investments as well as apply for membership of the World Trade Organisation which it became in 2005. The volatility of the Saudi economy due to dependence on oil revenues became stark due to continued political instability in the region during the 1980s and 1990s. GDP improved partly when oil prices rose but witnessed stagnation as oil prices became relatively stable. Liberalisation efforts gained momentum after 2000 to nudge the stagnating economy and the government started to reduce subsidies and encourage private investments (Ramady, 2005). Despite rising oil prices the Kingdom has to turn to economic liberalisation mainly because of demands for job creation as population and education increased but job opportunities remained limited. The most important aspect of liberalisation and privatisation was linking the domestic economy to global economy and the idea was to sustain growth as it had become difficult to grow in isolation. In the first decade of twenty-first century, Saudi Arabia witnessed economic growth and reforms measures to ensure long-term sustenance. The decade also witnessed an unprecedented rise in oil prices due to various external factors resulting in unprecedented revenues and massive rise in investments in social sectors and leading to profound impacts on the society.

Administrative Expansion

Except for the Hejaz region, at the time of its proclamation the Kingdom had no administrative structure in place. Towards ensuring the smooth running of the nascent state, the Kingdom was divided into administrative units, known as *mintaqa* or province, based on traditional territorial divisions, which were sub-divided into *muhafazat* or governorates. As of 2015, Saudi Arabia has 13 provinces and 118 governorates. Members of the al-Saud or lateral branches such as al-Jiluwi and others are appointed as governors and act as the representatives of the King.

As was the prevalent tribal practice, Ibn Saud, the King was the sole legislative, executive and judicial authority and acted in consultation with his advisors. The only other group that had a say in the matters of administration were the Wahhabi ulema who were consulted on important issues and their counsel respected (Lipsky, 1959). The most enduring and significant administrative mechanism, the office of Crown Prince, the immediate successor to the King was established in 1933 when Ibn Saud appointed his eldest surviving son Saud as Crown Prince thereby formalizing that succession will run among his sons (Al-Rasheed, 2010). This practice has been adhered to until 2015 when King Salman changed the order and named Mohammed bin Naif, the grandson of Ibn Saud as the Crown Prince.

The traditional congregations known as *majlis* (pl. *majalis*) played an important role in extending the legitimacy of the ruler. The informal and non-institutionalized congregation employed by Ibn Saud was a traditional system of administering the affairs of state. The entire administrative machinery comprised of the King, his close associates in the family, advisors and governors and the Wahhabi ulema and except for a few individuals such as his sons Saud and Faisal and close associates like Abdullah Sulayman and Ameen Rihani, none had pre-defined roles. The various congregations including *majlis aam* (public congregation), *majlis khas* (congregation of close associates) and *majlis dars* (congregation with ulema) served the dual purpose of display of power, wealth and authority as well as administrative, judicial and consultative bodies (Lipsky, 1959; Al-Rasheed, 2010). The final decisions were taken by the King in line with the tribal practices but he did not try to impress upon his

authority by taking decisions without consultation. Towards the late 1930s, the administration became formalised and the importance of the *majalis* started to decline with the emergence of a powerful Royal Court (*al-Diwan al-Maliki*)[7] which gradually became the highest executive body (Philby, 1955).

Early signs of expansion in the state structure were noticeable in October 1953, when a month before his death, Ibn Saud issued a decree establishing a Council of Ministers (*Majlis al-Wuzara*) formalising the executive body. The decree laid down the composition and functions of the most important organ for the state after the King and Royal Court, and represented "a genuine initial effort to institutionalize the exercise of the royal prerogative and to separate the exercise of authority from arbitrary decision-making procedure" (Lipsky, 1959: 116). It proved to be the beginning of a new era in the expansion and modernisation of the administration with the King as the head of the state and executive authority working through the royal court, council of ministers, new ministries, provincial governors and a growing bureaucracy "to serve and represent the royal family" and "also a large and growing nation" (Zuhur, 2011: 49). It was followed by the expansion and systematisation of existing ministries and establishment of new ones to look after emerging areas and challenges.

Government and Public Administration

At this nascent stage of state building, financial constraints were a major challenge and the Kingdom was facing difficulty to fund the expansion and modernisation of the administration. Until the 1940s, only five areas of administration had some degree of systematic and organised structure; the Political Affairs Committee (*al-Shu'ba al-Siyasiyah*) looked after the domestic political issues; external affairs had a defined roles and structure under Ministry of Foreign Affairs (*Wizara al Shi'un al-Kharijiya*); finance and defence was under one person but were organised under two different offices of Ministry of Finance (*Wizara al-Mal*) and the Defence Agency (*Wikala al-Difa'*) respectively; and Islamic affairs that included education, judiciary and Hajj were under

[7] The Royal Court was divided into several branches and acted as private office of the King; it had a number of royal counsellors who were drawn from domain experts who were made in charge of various branches of government (Lipsky 1959: 116). The Crown Prince maintained a separate private office known as Crown Prince Court until April 2015 when King Salman ordered merging of the two offices in a single Royal Court.

the control of Wahhabi ulema. The situation changed with the influx of oil wealth and towards the 1950s the al-Saud started to organise and expand the administration.

With the expansion in affairs of the state and growing business activities due to the oil-industry and its impact on the demography, the need for better administration became inevitable. The Kingdom embarked on the task of expanding and modernizing the administrative machinery in a planned and phased manner. In the early years, the administrative development and expansion were not uniform. Commercial production of oil began in 1939, and state revenues witnessed a surge; for example, in 1946 Saudi government revenues stood at US$13.5 million but in 1952, it rose to US$212 million (Al-Zikrili, 1970), a 20-fold increase. This provided the opportunities and resources to expand public utilities, enhance investments in public infrastructure and for the introduction of new transportation and communication systems.

One of the earlier departments were the political committee that emerged soon after the proclamation of the Kingdom and signalled the development of an organised administrative system. It comprised of the King, his two sons – Saud and Faisal – and some foreign advisors including Egyptian, Syrian and Lebanese experts and British officer St. John Philby (Almana, 1980). The committee dealt with domestic issues. As the Saudi state was recognised by world powers and diplomatic relations were forged, the need for a devoted foreign relations department was felt. The *Idarah li al-Shi'un al-Kharijiya* (Directorate of Foreign Affairs) was formed in 1926 and was upgraded to become *Wizarah li al-Shi'un al-Kharijiya* (Ministry of Foreign Affairs) in 1930. Faisal was designated as its head thereby making him the first foreign minister and was helped by some advisors. Foreign missions were housed in Jeddah as it was the centre for business, trade as well as was the entry and exit point for the outside world due to Hajj pilgrimage. On the other hand, Saudi merchants from prominent Najdi and Arab families, such as al-Qusaibi, were designated as representatives in countries where they had businesses (Almana, 1980).

The finances were handled by Abdullah Sulayman who did not have any formal title but was one of the most trusted associates of Ibn Saud. Over time, he came to be recognized as the first finance minister of the Kingdom. He not only dealt with the daily

functioning of the government but was the contact between Hejazi merchants and the King (Almana, 1980; Niblock, 1982; and Vassiliev, 1998). The ministry was revamped in the mid-1950s and until then the government finances had functioned in a traditional manner, accounting and auditing were almost non-existent while budgeting was hardly done on paper. All the government finances were supervised by Abdullah Sulayman who as Finance Minister functioned as the sole authority on all financial matters including budgeting, accounting and auditing and was in-charge of government's banking needs. The Ministry of Economy was formed in 1953 to delineate the financial matters from the need for economic growth, and then in 1954 Sulayman was replaced by Muhammad al-Sabban (Royal Decree, 1953). The Ministry functioned somewhat smoothly during the period between 1954 and 1958 when King Saud was trying to streamline the financial system and the two ministries were merged in 1954 and renamed Ministry of Finance and National Economy (Royal Decree, 1954). The 1958 budgeting became a major problem due to lack of funds and this led to feuds. As political problems escalated, financial matters became a major point of contestations and showdown between King Saud and Crown Prince Faisal (Yizraeli, 1997), thus the Kingdom saw as many as six ministers presiding over the finance ministry between 1958 to 1964 (MoF, 2013b).

Ministries of Interior and Health were formed in 1951 and Ministries of Communication, Education and Agriculture and Water in 1953 (Zuhur, 2011). This brought to focus the need for improvement in services including education and healthcare that were yet to reach a wider section of the population. The administration continued to expand and the Ministries of Petroleum and Mineral Resources and Hajj and Islamic Endowments were established in 1960 (Wynbrandt, 2010). In 1962, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs came up recognising the need for welfare of the growing labour force and society at large. A year later the Ministry of Information was formed to look after the expanding need for dissemination of information and regulating the mass media and press that had started to flourish (Samin, 2015).

The Ministry of Petroleum and Minerals was established in 1960 following the formation of the Suadi-initiated Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) in September 1960. That was also the time of contestation within the family and Saud,

in trying to undermine the growing influence of Faisal, had carved the new oil ministry and handed it over to Abdullah Tariki, a close associate of Prince Talal, the 'Free Prince' (Niblock, 1982). However, when Faisal regained his position in the government, Tariki fell out of his favour due to his liberal inclinations and was removed from the office. Technocrat Ahmed Zaki Yamani was made the petroleum minister and held that position until 1986. The oil ministry looks after one of the most important sectors in Saudi government and coordinates not only with petroleum exports and OPEC but also deals with the ARAMCO, the largest oil company in the world.

These existing and new ministries employed a large number of Saudis at different levels leading to the expansion of the bureaucracy and emergence of a newly educated middle class (Rugh, 1973). It also impacted the socio-economic aspects of people's life as they lived in mixed urban localities, a significant departure from tribal villages and urban settlements of the past and interacted with others on work locations (Al-Rasheed, 2010). Apart from the bureaucracy, oil-industry was another platform that provided mixed work and residential environment with social impacts. As trade and commerce grew, it created opportunities for new groups of people to engage in trade and commerce, small businesses, construction industry and contracts leading to need for further expansion in the administration, and particularly the demands for education and healthcare increased. Towards the late 1960s, the administration had started to take an organised shape with well-defined structures and divisions in spheres of responsibility. A serious problem faced during this period was the lack of adequately educated and trained Saudi human resource to manage the expanding administration mainly at the middle level. It forced the monarchy to rely on nationals of other Arab countries, more often from Egypt, Syria and Lebanon and upon Palestinian refugees (Philby, 1955; Lipsky, 1959). However, higher administrative staff came from among the Saudi families including from al-Saud, lateral branches and allies.

Religious Administration

Religious affair (*al-Shi'un al-Diniya*) is a significant area and ulema have been one of the most organised groups since establishment of the Kingdom but were not regulated and religious bureaucracy was non-existent. In fact, ulema bestowed legitimacy to Ibn Saud's military expedition during the run up to the establishment of the third Saudi

state, terming it as a religious duty to establish an Islamic state. Hence, in the early years, Wahhabi ulema had an important function as advisors to Ibn Saud, who held regular *majlis* with them and sought their advice on important state matters. In addition to the religious affairs they also oversaw education which was largely confined to mosques and they functioned as informal judiciary whereby people consulted them over disputes and respected their counsel and judgements. Select ulema had direct access to the King and advised him on legal matters on issues that reached the Royal Court for adjudication. In this respect the clergy wielded strong independent and collective influence over the society as well as the affairs of the state (Lipsky, 1959).

The relationship between the King and ulema, however, was not always smooth and on issues such as the introduction of technology, rules and regulations, differences appeared (Sfeir, 1988). For example, Wahhabi ulema wanted imposition of the Hanbali *fiqh* on the entire population, including the Shias, and end of Ottoman regulations, particularly in case of Hejaz. The King countered these argument and overruled them arguing that those Ottoman regulations within the limits of *shari'a* need not be changed. Similar differences were witnessed over allowing oil exploration and Ibn Saud had countered them with religious arguments (Al-Mumayiz, 1963; Lacey, 2009), thus, establishing a precedent that institutionalised the relationship for times to come. The ulema wielded power but were gradually subordinated to al-Saud authority (discussed in Chapter Seven).

Meanwhile, ulema continued to be an important part of the government enjoying state patronage in return of endorsing its policies. They functioned as the moral vanguard of the state by providing religious basis for administrative modernisation and started to wield influence on state affairs as a coherent participating group. Although a powerful 'religious officialdom' started to emerge in the administrative structure in early years of the Kingdom as a parallel force to modernisation (Lipsky, 1959: 103), the clergy was yet to take shape of an arm in the official structures of the government. The office of *al-Mufti al-Aam* (Grand Mufti) existed since 1953 when Muhammad bin Ibrahim al-Shaikh, a member of the powerful al-Shaikh family, was appointed the Grand Mufti and played the role of advisor on important executive decisions and functions. In addition, the Committee for Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice (*Hai'a al-Amr bi al-*

Ma'rouf wa Nahi an al-Munkar) that was established in 1940 wielded influence, though it had a limited role in general administration. The committee, popularly known as *Hai'a* and its members knows as *mutawwa* or religious police, enforced morality and religious practices in public including in the holy cities and played as vanguards of conservatism, thereby gaining notoriety both inside and outside the Kingdom (Cordesman, 2003; al-Bishr, 2008; and Raphael, 2009). The ulema had major influence in some spheres especially in education, judiciary and social affairs as they held higher and middle level positions; a number of the ulema were appointed as teachers and preachers in these ministries.

Faisal upon taking over the reign formalised the relations between state and the ulema (Al-Rasheed, 2010) and senior ulema became part of state apparatus to ensure their support for administrative reforms. The office of Grand Mufti was kept vacant after the death of Ibrahim al-Shaikh in 1969[8] to avoid divisions among the clergy and this remained vacant until King Fahd named the popular Sheikh Bin Baz to that position in 1993. *Hai'a Kibar al-Ulema* (Council of Senior Ulema; CSU) was established in 1971 and all influential religious preachers and leaders were appointed in the CSU to give the impression that the ulema are part of the government. The mandate of the CSU was to deliberate on important state issues and give their advice in keeping the Islamic nature of the state intact (Al-Yassini, 1985). It enhanced the legitimacy of the government policies and differences among ulema were kept within the confines of the CSU.

Faisal recognised the need to take the clergy into confidence as their opposition could have derailed his modernisation efforts or would have created problems for the al-Saud legitimacy. On instances such as the introduction of education for girls in 1962, television station in 1965[9] and influx of foreign workers to help in the infrastructure development and growth in the oil industry after the oil boom of 1973, the ulema had to be co-opted to justify and emphasize on the Islamic basis of these modernisation efforts.

[8] The office remained vacant till 1993 when Abdulaziz bin Abdullah bin Baz who till then was the director of the General Presidency of Research and Ifta was appointed the Grand Mufti by King Fahd in the wake of the Kuwait crisis. He was succeeded by Abdulaziz al-Shaikh in 1999 who holds the office until now.

[9] It was during the protest against the establishment of this television broadcasting station that one of King's nephew Khalid bin Musaid bin Abdulaziz was killed in police firing. Khalid's brother Faisal assassinated King Faisal in 1975 as revenge for his brother's death.

Ignoring their concerns and opposition was unviable because of the nature of the state and society. Thus, ulema were given the responsibilities of important sectors including education, social services, mass media and their concerns and their counsel were taken into account while laying down policies and programmes for these sectors. For example, ulema were concerned about intermixing of men and women if girls started to go to schools, so segregation in public schools (after kinder garden) was introduced and only female teachers were appointed in girl's schools. Similarly, large portions of television and radio broadcast were allotted to religious programmes for which preachers were appointed and paid by the government (Al-Yassini, 1985). In spite of these measures, the introduction of modern education for girls angered sections of conservative ulema and in 1963 strong protests to the introduction of girl's education broke out in the Najdi town of Buraydah leading to use of force to control the situation (Hamdan, 2005; Lacey, 2009).

A related area of religious affairs was Hajj but it had immense political, international and economic significance. The ruling family personally supervised the administration of Hajj with the help of ulema who had been in charge of the Kaaba in Mecca and prophet's mosque in Medina since the founding the state. They regulated the ritual aspects of Hajj while the al-Saud controlled the temporal aspects and it worked well for a while until the need for better organisation and security arose due to rising numbers of pilgrims. The Ministry of Hajj was formed in 1960 to coordinate Hajj and Umrah pilgrimages and in 1977 a General Presidency for the Two Holy Mosques (later renamed as General Presidency for the Haram Mosque and the Prophet's Mosque) was formed to look after the holy places in Mecca and Medina.

Judiciary

The organization of the judiciary took longer because of strong influence and even resistance of the clergy. In fact, Ibn Saud took steps to formalise the judicial system, which affected the authority of ulema. The system of court was put in place for the first time in the late 1930s and laws and regulations were issued similar to other Muslim countries in the region, particularly over matters related to commercial disputes. Existing Ottoman rules in Hejaz on regulation of market and commercial affairs were retained (Sfeir, 1988). Ibn Saud made efforts to formalise commercial tribunals but was

blocked by the ulema on the grounds that it had no precedence in *shari'a*, a point conceded by the King. For a long time the tribal *majlis* and mosques had played the role of justice delivery system and the King played the role of the highest judicial authority and final arbitrator. Occasionally he consulted the ulema to resolves cases that reached his court. However, during the lifetime of Ibn Saud the judicial system had not taken a formal shape, even though disputes and criminal acts were on the raise due to increased commercial activities (Lipsky, 1959; Wynbrandt, 2010).

By late 1950s, with growing population, increasing economic activities, mounting financial disputes and rising levels of crime, it was becoming impossible to manage the judiciary without reorganisation. At the same time, it was immensely difficult to reforms the judiciary due to the power wielded by the ulema who did not want to lose their sway to the process of modernisation. *Shari'a* was the basis of law for civil and personal matters and in 1925 Ibn Saud had issued a decree to recognise all schools of *fiqh* for adjudication (al-Jarbou, 2004). Despite the decree, Hanbali jurisprudence was applied in most cases as a large number of judges were drawn from Wahhabi ulema. The limitations of *shari'a* law were exposed in matters related to commercial disputes, wherein its principles could not be applied. In the contest with the ulema, the royal authority eventually prevailed as commercial matters were regulated under royal legislations but plans for commercial tribunals could not be realized until 1955 when the Board of Grievances was established (Sfeir, 1988).

Even after some reorganization, the judiciary remained predominantly under religious influence. The legal norms that were implemented "maintained the supremacy of Islamic law...not in traditional Islamic but in contemporary legal forms" (Schacht, 1959: 138). The *qadis* (judges) were drawn from Islamic universities and were trained in *shari'a* law, heavily coloured in Wahhabi convictions. All major cities had *shari'a* courts and judges were appointed by Riyadh-based Chief Qadi who in turn was appointed by the King (Abu Talib, 1984; Al-Darayb, 1999). The system of adjudication varied from region to region as a centralised judicial structure was yet to emerge. For example, Hejaz had a Judicial Supervisory Committee located in Mecca functioning as higher court of appeal while in the case of Eastern Province the same function was carried out by the Grand Mufti based in Riyadh (Lipsky, 1959). In many areas local

tribal leaders and religious sheikhs functioned as Qadis in local disputes and adjudicated on the basis of customary laws. The King remained the highest authority in judicial matters and in the late 1950s a more complex bureaucratic mechanism started to develop.

Judiciary was streamlined and reorganised in the 1970s and 1980s. First step was the establishment of the Ministry of Justice in 1971 making it the main body to overlook the judiciary and this allowed the government to lay the foundations for an organised judiciary and in 1975 the Judiciary Act was issued (Royal Decree, 1975) that built upon the existing judicial system and formalised the organisation and functioning of *shari'a* courts. It provided the guidelines for judicial independence, types of courts and their jurisdiction, appointment of judges and the role of the Ministry of Justice (Al-Ghadyan, 1998). The act provided for a hierarchical system of *shari'a* court comprising the Supreme Judicial Council, Court of Appeal, General Courts and Summary Courts (Al-Jabrou, 2004). The judiciary has since then continued to evolve and a number of reforms have been introduced through royal decrees and the Basic Law of 1992 to modernise and expand the justice delivery system (Kèchichian, 2013). Despite all changes, the influence of Wahhabi ulema remains strong and *shari'a* remains the guiding principle of law the clergy continues to function as judges (Aba-Namay, 1993).

Defence

Unlike judiciary, the security affairs had started to take a coherent shape quite early. In 1934, the *Wikala al-Difa`* (Defence Agency) was established to overlook security and defence and was headed by Abdullah Sulayman in addition to his role as in charge of finances (Philby, 1955). Earlier, defence was looked after by the military affairs department which worked directly under the supervision of Ibn Saud but the military was traditional and was loosely organised; the family was core of the military and the periphery constituted of slaves (*abd*) and soldiers from loyal and friendly tribes. A Royal Guard had existed since the beginning of Ibn Saud's expedition in 1902 and comprised of the best soldiers chosen from among the slaves and Bedouins. The *Ikhwan* fighters who were drawn from nomadic Bedouins formed another wing of the military (Habib, 1978). They had rebelled against Ibn Saud in 1927-28 but were effectively eliminated with British material and financial help and the residual *Ikhwan* forces

remained under the "office of Jihad and Mujahideen" until 1954 when the office was abolished and the forces were reorganised under the newly formed National Guard (*Asharq al-Awsat*, 2006; Cordesman, 2009; MoNG, 2015).

Once Hejaz came under Saudi rule, the Hejazi army and police forces were inducted into the Saudi security apparatus. The *Wikala* was assigned the task of organising the armed forces including training, standardization and allocation of spheres of work. It undertook expansion and organisation of the army initially from its base in Taif and in 1938-39 it was shifted to Riyadh (RSLF, 2015). Towards the early 1940s, an armed forces with semblance of modernisation helped by newly inducted advisors and generals from across the region started to emerge with various divisions and regiments (Pollack, K., 2002). As a result of this expansion and organisation and keeping in tune with increasing requirements, the Defence Agency was upgraded into the Ministry of Defence in 1943.

A number of local and regional security issues emerged during the 1950s and 1960s and the Kingdom took measures to consolidate the security apparatus and police forces (Pollack, K., 2002). Prince Sultan was appointed Minister of Defence in 1962 (a position he held until his death in 2011) and started working on the modernisation of the armed forces. Defence budget increased rapidly afterwards; for example, it was 14 percent of the national budget in 1960-61, grew to 19 percent in 1964-65 and reached 30 percent in 1970-71 and according to reports the 1971-72 budget had 40 percent allocation for revamp and modernisation of the security forces (Abir, 1974). During this period Saudi Arabia invested in buying heavy weaponry from the United States to equip its land and air forces. A defence agreement was signed with the United States in 1962 to train Saudi service men and most of the officers in the land and air forces were trained in various US military colleges (ibid). In addition to the various branches of the armed forces, the police forces were expanded under the Ministry of Interior.

Administrative Reorganisation under Faisal

During the reign of King Faisal the system became better as he focussed on improving the administration for smooth functioning of state affairs and better services for the population and development of all sectors including economy, elementary and higher

education, healthcare etc (Wynbrandt, 2010). He streamlined the security apparatus and started to modernise the army and establish more extensive air defence system (Cordesman, 1997). An important aspect of the modernisation programme was the introduction of modern technology to improve services. Stabilising the administration was another area that got the attention and led to appointment of professionals and technocrats to important administrative positions. One such appointment was of Ahmed Zaki Yamani in charge of ministry of petroleum in 1962, other ministries such as water and irrigation, healthcare etc too were assigned to professionals (Zuhur, 2011). At the same time, to avoid family feud King Faisal gave important positions in the government to his half-brothers.

Towards the 1970s the bureaucracy started to mould in a coherent structure with rise in number of civil servants appointed to take care of various responsibilities. With the expansion in administrative machinery and development of bureaucracy, a modernised administrative system started to emerge and stabilise. Oil boom and efficient handling of wealth by Faisal set the pitch for steady and modern administrative system. Planning, overlooked until then, gained attention and the Central Planning Organisation (1965) was upgraded in 1975 as Ministry of Planning (Wynbrandt, 2010). Five-year plans were started in 1970 aiming at infrastructural development such as construction of roads, airports and ports, enhancement of power supply, introduction and expansion of communication system including telephone, health infrastructure and education (Al-Rasheed, 2010). As revenues grew, the government subsidized essential utilities, food items, water and electricity. The plan focussed on urban areas such as Riyadh, Jeddah and Khobar leading to rise in urban-rural divide in terms of infrastructure and propelled the initial wave of internal migration leading to rise in population of urban centres (Mackey, 2002).

The administrative machinery had started to stabilise with influx of oil-wealth and management of major areas such as finance and economy, security and defence, religious affairs, domestic politics and external relations started to function smoothly. Focus now shifted to improve and expand social services such as education, healthcare, roads and transport etc. An important area that lagged behind till the 1960s was education; on the one hand Faisal established Islamic universities to please the ulema

and formalise religious education but he also promoted modern education by increasing budget allocation for school and higher education. This led to rapid improvement in educational infrastructure and the system was expanded to provide basic education to children under the age of 16, apart from improving the quality of teaching and learning. Accordingly, the number of schools for boys and girls grew and spread in different parts of Saudi Arabia, including in the much neglected Eastern and Northern provinces. As a result, there were 226 schools in 1951 and 301 in 1952 and with huge increase in the next two decades, the number of school rose to almost 3,000 in 1969-70 and more than 5,000 in the year 1974-75 (MoI, 1998).

This was also the time when the need for human resource development was recognised leading to emphasis on higher education. The Ministry of Higher Education was establishing in 1975 and many new universities and institutions of higher learning were founded. The education system was expanded to accommodate an increasing number of school graduates and helped in increasing enrolment in higher education institutions and as of 1981-82, more than 63,000 students were enrolled (Saleh, 1986). Existing universities such as the Petroleum and Minerals university in Dhahran (that later came to known as King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals), King Saud University in Riyadh and King Abdulaziz University in Jeddah received substantial government support for expansion and modernisation. Higher education for women was started with active interest of Queen Iffat al-Thunayan (Kéchichian, 2008).

Healthcare development was another area that followed the oil boom. Till the 1960s, facilities were confined to major cities such as Riyadh, Jeddah, Mecca, Medina, Taif and Dammam and were “grossly insufficient” for the growing population, which had forced people to rely upon “traditional forms of health care” (Mufti, 2000: 4). With beginning of planned development, healthcare gained attention and efforts were made to improve healthcare facilities and increase the number of health professionals. Primary health care centres were opened in all towns and cities and many new agencies such as the Saudi Red Crescent, armed forces and Ministry of Interior too invested in building modern hospitals to provide healthcare leading to improved facilities towards the late 1980s (ibid).

It was during the 1970s and 1980s of administrative modernisation and stabilisation of state bureaucracy that the welfare system of the Kingdom came to the fore with the help of massive oil-wealth. The government started to take care of almost all aspects of day-to-day needs of the citizens including education, health, housing, and so on (Zuhur, 2011). With the expansion and stabilisation of state machinery and rising number of educated youth, the state emerged as the largest employer. Education and training facilities were expanded to enhance human resource. Faisal's policy was continued by his successor Khalid as the Kingdom made effort to develop infrastructure and diversify the economy. The emergence of a vast state-funded growth and educated middle class (Rugh, 1973) made a profound impact on the social life creating new social structures. Educated professionals, technocrats, academicians, officials, doctors, engineers, scientists and teachers emerged as the major support base for the al-Saud. Their living style, social behaviour, familial links, attitude towards women and religion and their role in the society started to evolve (discussed in respective chapters).

The period after the Kuwait crisis witnessed many changes, expansion and modernisation in the administration but they were largely topical in nature and did not substantially alter the state structure or its nature. They were rather a reflection of the changing needs for providing better services due to demographic changes and need for improvement in education system and judiciary, mainly after 11 September attacks and have been discussed in the following chapters.

Conclusion

As one traces the story of the evolution of a tribal-political-religious union to a modernised Kingdom that has remained stable despite many internal and external challenges, the trajectories of its political, economic and administrative developments come to the fore and provide the context for examining the social reforms. A strong ruling family that gained and appropriated power on the basis of historical claims and traditional principles and has continued to renew its legitimacy to rule through reforms and modernisation while keeping the system intact has been the most important aspect of the Saudi polity. At the same time, the discovery of oil and the prosperity it brought to the ruling family and through a sustained improvement in the cradle-to-grave services

provided to the people defines the economic and administrative evolution. These changes give insights into the trajectories of social reforms and are reflective of the way power sharing was done among the political elites. The al-Saud had come to power and sustained it through tribal manoeuvrings in a predominantly Bedouin society with the help of the traditional symbols of power – material wealth, military might and political acumen – thus, the allocation of power and wealth became the main source of acquiring political loyalty. However, with the introduction of modernisation in administrative, economic and political spheres, some of the traditional social ideals of identity, prestige and honour have been replaced with new norms. This has led to changes in behaviour and attitude and modes of interaction among individuals and groups, even though family remains the basic component of the society and in deciding the socio-political behaviour.

Chapter Four

Demography: Changes and Challenges

Demography can be defined as the study of population through data and statistics pertaining to birth, death, income, migration, urbanisation etc towards understanding the changing composition of a society (Bongaarts, 2009). It studies causes and consequences of population change with respect to institutions such as family, economy and religion among others and how they shape and in turn are shaped by variables such as nuptiality, fertility, mortality etc (Coale, 1984; Chesnais, 1992; Kirk, 1996). Indeed, demography reflects the internal dynamics and temporal changes that can deeply affect the social structures and culture through their long term impacts (Bumpass, 1990; Hammel, 1990; Kirk, 1996). It is argued that demographic changes indicate the stage of development underlining challenges in the society in terms of providing a better standard of life for the people (Coale, 1984; Chesnais, 1992).

Demographic change reflects the changing nature and characteristic of a population, which contributes to social change. In the Saudi context, the most important aspect of demographic transition has been its transformation from a predominantly nomadic to a near total settled population, an outcome of the discovery of oil and subsequent economic growth. Moreover, like other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, Saudi Arabia also witnessed a huge influx of expatriate workers from Arab and Asian countries that contributed to its changing demographic profile. In the smaller states such as Qatar, Kuwait and the UAE, expatriates population forms the majority while in Saudi Arabia more than 30 per cent of the resident population are expatriates. Furthermore, declining population growth rate, falling fertility rate and low mortality, rapid urbanisation and high youth population reflect important aspects of Saudi demography.

An analysis of demographic transition in Saudi Arabia can help problematise questions regarding the agencies and components of social reforms. During the period under study, the Kingdom has undergone substantial demographic changes and although the process started earlier, it gained momentum towards the end of the twentieth century

catalysed by the economic modernisation. Estimates suggest that at the time of the proclamation of the Kingdom in 1932, the Saudi population was 2.5 million (Lahmeyer, 2003). It grew to about 3 million in 1950, 4 million in 1960, 5.8 million in 1970 and 10 million in 1980, and in 1990 the population reached nearly 16 million (United Nations, 2013a). In 2010 it was estimated at 28 million, the population as of 2015 is 30 million, and is expected to grow to 35 million in 2020 (United Nations, 2015).

Similarly, urban population has grown substantially; in 1932 it was estimated at approximately 300,000 or about 12 per cent of the population and nearly 60 per cent of this urban population resided in Hejaz region (Lahmeyer, 2003). Estimates suggest that the urban population reached about 650,000 in 1950 (21 per cent), 1.2 million in 1960 (30 per cent), 2.8 million in 1970 (48 per cent), 6.5 million in 1980 (65 per cent) and grew up to 12.5 million in 1990 (76 per cent) (United Nations, 2012a). The urban population was estimated at 82 per cent or 22 million in 2010 and as of 2015 an estimated 85 per cent of the population or 26 million live in urban areas, and it is projected to reach 90 per cent by 2020 (ibid). Beside other factors, since the 1980s, the steep rise in the urban population is due to the influx of expatriate workers who are concentrated in urban areas. Thus, seen in context of national population, the urbanisation rate is slower than actually reflected from the above figures. For example, as of 2015 nearly 10 million expatriates reside in the Kingdom and predominantly live in urban areas, which mean of the total approximately 20 million Saudis nearly 16 million live in urban areas. It means if one takes into account only the national population, slightly less than 80 per cent are urban population.

Other demographic indicators, such as mortality, age structure, fertility, health conditions, life expectancy, and internal migration too witnessed changes. Numerous factors including discovery of oil, economic growth, domestic political conditions, improvements in education, urbanization and migration and the influx of a large expatriate labour force have affected the demography. This chapter examines the process of demographic transition and identifies its determinants and impacts. It views social reforms through the demographic perspectives and analyzes the process, extent and challenges emanating from these changes. The chapter has been divided into two sections; first, explains the demographic changes, and second examines the challenges.

A number of indicators such as population growth, fertility, mortality, marital trends, health facilities, age structure, human resource, urbanisation and internal and international migration have been used to explain the causes, consequences and challenges of the demographic changes.

Demographic Transition

Demography is an important indicator for socio-economic transition and improvements in key indicators demonstrate an overall progress in the society. It represents aspects such as better economic performance, improved education level, and reduction in poverty (Coale, 1984; Chesnais, 1992) but can have deeper implications such as on questions of identity and changes in values and norms (Bumpass, 1990; Hammel, 1990; Kirk, 1996); for example, rapid urbanisation has affected the tribal and regional identities but consequently helped in emergence of a wider Saudi ‘national identity’ (Nevo, 1985; Weston, 1987). As the impacts of demographic transition vary in terms of its consequences, the catalysts for these changes can also be numerous such as economic growth, education, natural factors such as environmental and geographic changes and improvement in health care etc.

The evolution of Saudi Arabia from a desert monarchy lacking basic infrastructure and amenities for its largely nomadic farm-based rural population to a modernised oil-based economy by the 1990s had irreversible impacts on its demography. This change in the character of the population from nomadic to a settled life was its most important demographic change. When Ibn Saud was seeking to restore the al-Saud rule in early 20th century, the Arabian Peninsula was tribal with a largely nomadic population except in the Hejaz region. The tribal population lived an autonomous life and the idea of ‘state’ and ‘nation’ in their modern meaning were non-existent (Khoury and Kostiner, 1990). Hejaz which had a settled and somewhat cosmopolitan population due to pilgrims, traders, religious learners and Sufi saints from across the Muslim world who settled in Jeddah, Mecca and Medina, and was ruled by the Hashemite family too was not exposed to ideas of nation and state (Baker, 1979). The rest of the peninsular population largely maintained a nomadic or semi-nomadic lifestyle and had only limited interaction with the outside world (Kour, 1991).

The establishment of a Kingdom by unifying different parts of the Arabian Peninsula between 1902 and 1932 did not transform the demographic characteristic of the population and people largely continued to live a nomadic life. Their life remained unaffected by the early political changes and a large section of the population continued to dwell in tribal settlements and retained the nomadic lifestyle (Lipsky, 1959; Niblock, 1982; Kostiner, 1990). The population at the time can be divided into two types, namely, settled (*hadar*) and nomadic (*badu*). This division, however, was fluid in nature and as articulated by historian Z. H. Kour:

> The dividing line between the two groups was not always clearly defined since there were stages of nomadism and sedentarism. Every now and then some nomads gave up their nomadism for a settled way of life, and occasionally elements in the sedentary population opted for the desert (Kour, 1991: 186).

Further, he points that the contacts between the two groups were limited to trade and commerce as they not only mistrusted each other but also had a sense of superiority over the other (Kour, 1991; Al-Harbi, 2011).

Changes in the social organisation were a post-oil phenomenon mainly because economic opportunities opened internal migration and settled population began to grow, particularly in cities such as Riyadh and Jeddah. Urban settlements of oil workers came up in Dammam and Dhahran in Eastern Province, where commercial production of oil began (Parssinen and Talib, 1982). Till the 1950s, the population remained rooted in tribalism when economic, administrative and demographic changes started to make impacts on the ways people organised their lives. The situation started to change after the formalisation of state structures and large scale production of oil. Nomadism declined and people started to move and settle in towns and villages around newly emerging trading centres and oil industry. This process impacted the tribal structure and began to weaken old linkages. New modes of interactions replaced the old; for example, *hadars* and *badus* who hardly had any contacts previously started to live in same localities or areas thereby resulting in frequent contacts and interactions. Though this did not change their sense of identity, it changed the perceptions about the other. Similarly, with consolidation of the state and law enforcement mechanism and policing, frequent raids on trade and pilgrimage caravans nearly disappeared (Khoury and Kostiner, 1990).

As the formalisation of state structures gained momentum, during the 1960s organisation of life changed to a nearly settled population (Fabietti, 1982). Many nomadic tribes particularly in the Najd region either started to live in settlements to reap the benefits of state policies or were forced to settle down to avoid tribal skirmishes (Al Hathloul and Edadan, 1991; Kour, 1991). This change in demographic character of the population profoundly impacted the society. Settled life in urban setup resulted in people belonging to different tribes, ethnicities and regions living together, if not in the same household then at least in the same locality or in vicinity. Sometimes they worked in the same work place or had trade and commercial relations (Lipsky, 1959). It led to weakening of traditional identities based in descent and tribal linkages, but life continued to be organised on the existing kinship networks and thus familial identities remained strong (Kour, 1991). More changes were noticeable during the 1970s as fast economic modernisation in the wake of oil boom led to rapid urbanisation and frequent inter-tribal interactions, thereby resulting in further weakening of identities based on descent.

As a result of these changes, the self-sustained nature of tribal life came to an end and interactions between different regions and tribes became frequent and sometime fluid in terms of social interaction and intermixing (Altorki and Cole, 1989). Towards the late 1970s and early 1980s, the introduction of road transport, telecommunication and postal services, modern education and radio and television broadcast profoundly affected the society. A decade later society experienced major transformations and life came to be organised largely around economic activities and occupation and less on erstwhile tribal affinities or regional identities. These changes further strengthened due to increased industrialisation, exposure to the outside world, introduction of fast means of communications and growing penetration of internet and social media that can be collectively understood as globalisation.

Influx of Expatriate Workers and Impacts

Oil boom and economic modernisation not only changed the Saudi demographic characteristic from a nomadic to settled life but also brought a large pool of expatriate workers to engage in the oil and oil-driven industries. The GCC countries lacked expertise and human resource to steer economic growth despite having massive oil

wealth which forced them to bring expatriate human resource, from Arab, Asian and African countries. Scholars observe that international migration was the most significant contributing factor to the growth in urban demography in the GCC countries since the 1970s (Mogadam, 2004; Tabutin and Schoumaker, 2005). It led to a sudden increase in the resident population; in the 1970s the number of expatriates living and working in the Kingdom was less than 100,000 and by the late 1980s more than four million expatriates were living in Saudi Arabia. As per the 1992 census, the population was 16.94 million of which 72.6 per cent, that is, 12.31 million were Saudi nationals while 4.63 million were expatriates making 27.4 per cent of the total resident population (MoEP, 1992). The expatriate population further grew since the early 1990s and as of 2015 an estimated 10 million expatriates live in the Kingdom, making nearly one-third of the resident population (MoEP, 2015).

Expatriates are concentrated in urbanised and industrialised provinces such as Riyadh, Mecca, Medina and Eastern Province while less urbanised and industrialised provinces such as Baha, Tabuk and Northern Border Province attract only a fraction of expatriates. As per the 2010 census, the four more urbanised provinces housed nearly seven million out of the total 8.4 million expatriates while the three less urbanised provinces only had 250,000 expatriates (**Table 4.1**). Riyadh and Mecca the most populous provinces had 2.48 million and 2.79 million expatriates respectively and the Northern Border Province only had around 50,000.

Women constitute a small fraction of the expatriate population, as shown in **Table 4.1**, the sex ratio among expatriates living in the Kingdom as per the 2010 census was 420 women for 1,000 men. This highlights the fact that largely the expatriate workers either are not allowed to or cannot afford to bring families because of high cost of living. It also affects the sex ratio of the total population (Mirkin, 2010). For example, over the years, the sex ratio among national population has largely hovered around 970 women every 1,000 men (**Table 4.2**) but the sex ratio among the resident population is much lower and in 2010 recorded 695 women for every 1,000 men (MoEP, 2010).

Table 4.1: Regional Distribution of Expatriate Population in Saudi Arabia, 2010

Provinces	Total	Male	Female	Sex Ratio (female per 1,000 male)
Riyadh	2,480,401	1,762,631	717,770	407
Mecca	2,798,941	1,828,412	970,529	530
Medina	515,421	350,488	164,933	470
Qaseem	287,367	223,403	63,964	286
Eastern Province	1,214,665	924,771	289,894	313
Asir	322,545	248,055	74,490	300
Tabuk	130,382	99,091	31,291	315
Hail	109,940	84,161	25,779	306
Northern Borders	52,347	39,550	12,797	323
Jazan	260,015	176,990	83,025	469
Najran	103,228	75,339	27,889	370
Baha	63,252	48,852	14,400	294
Jouf	90,897	71,231	19,666	276
Total	**8,429,401**	**5,932,974**	**2,496,427**	**420**

Source: MoEP, 2010.

The expatriate population has been instrumental in the economic growth and infrastructure development and the role of expatriate population in the economic

development of the GCC countries including Saudi Arabia is well documented (El Azhary, 1984; Winckler, 1997; Naufal and Genc, 2012). On the other hand, the influx of a large number of international migrants pressurizes infrastructure and amenities and partly contributes to unemployment among native population. The problem was manageable in the 1970s and 1980s as the number of expatriates was around four million, and the proportion of educated and skilled Saudis was lower and unemployment rate among educated Saudis was less than five per cent (World Bank, 2015) and the monarchy had ample wealth to satisfy the native population through economic largess and investments in health and education. The situation did not attract much attention until unemployment among educated Saudi rose to more than 25 per cent as of 1991 (ibid). The growing demands for reforms in the aftermath of the Kuwait Crisis forced the al-Saud to initiate measures towards controlling migrant expatriate labour.

Towards mitigating unemployment among the educated youth the nationalisation of work force was introduced in the 1990s but its success was limited (Bahgat, 1999; Bosbait and Wilson, 2005). A variety of factors such as lack of skilled national manpower, lacunas in the education system and unwillingness of the Saudis to take menial jobs as drivers, cleaners etc have resulted in continued and excessive reliance on the expatriate workforce (Karoly, 2010; Peck, 2015). For example, in 2014 expatriates made up 78 per cent of the total Saudi workforce (Naffee, 2015). This high reliance upon the international migration was mainly due to post-oil boom infrastructural development and corresponding reluctance of nationals to participate in them (Winckler, 1997).

While the large expatriate population has helped in galvanising the economic growth and infrastructural development, it also put pressure on the scarce local resources such as food and water and in the process increased the imports bill. Studies suggest that through proper management and some policy initiative for conservation and proper utilisation, the Kingdom has partly been successful in overcoming the handicap posed due to geographical and climatic conditions (Crane et al., 2011). The abundance of oil wealth largely enabled the Kingdom to meet the food security challenges (Mahmud, 2014).

Population Growth

Equally important changes have been taking place in the demographic situation of the native population. Saudi Arabia witnessed a huge rise in its national population which grew rapidly due to improved economic developments and the resultant improvement in quality of life and health care facilities. There was a noticeable population explosion in the 1950s (Moghadam, 2004; Tabutin and Schoumaker, 2005) and the accelerated oil wealth in the 1970s brought about a 'baby boom.' As a result, the national population grew by 66 per cent in the 1970s, 45 per cent in the 1980s, 35 per cent in the 1990s and 26 per cent in the 2000s. From 1992 to 2010, a 65.8 per cent increase in national population was recorded (**Table 4.2**).

Table 4.2: Citizen Population Trends in Saudi Arabia, 1932 and 2015 (in millions)

Year	1932	1950	1960	1970	1980	1992	2004	2010	2015
Men	NA	1.58	2.05	2.97	5.20	6.21	8.28	9.52	10.78
Women	NA	1.53	2.03	2.86	4.50	6.09	8.24	9.18	10.92
Sex Ratio (female per 1,000 male)	NA	968	990	962	865	980	995	964	1,012
Total	2.5	3.11	4.08	5.83	9.70	12.31	16.52	18.70	21.70

Source: Adopted from Lahmeyer, 2003; MoEP, 1992; MoEP, 2010; and United Nations, 2013a.

Note: Figures for 1992, 2004 and 2010 are from Saudi census data; 2015 figures are UN projections.

In other words, while there is a huge increase in the national population since the late 1980s Saudi population growth rate has been declining. The United Nations defines population growth rate as "average annual rate (in percentage) of change of population size during a specified period" (United Nations, 2007: 57) and the data shows that between 1980 and 1985 the Saudi growth rate was 5.98 per cent and between 2005 and 2010 it declined to 1.98 per cent (**Table 4.3**). According to Saudi sources, between the

censuses in 1974 and 1992, the native population grew at 3.7 per cent annually (MoEP, 1992) and between the 1992 and 2010 censuses it declined to 2.6 per cent (MoEP, 2010). This shows that, even though both local and resident population expanded, the national growth rate declined.

Table 4.3: Population Growth Rate in Saudi Arabia, 1950-2020

Period	Growth Rate (in per cent)
1950-55	2.62
1955-60	2.77
1960-65	3.40
1965-70	3.73
1970-75	4.82
1975-80	5.77
1980-85	5.97
1985-90	4.05
1990-95	2.84
1995-2000	2.53
2000-05	2.91
2005-10	1.98
2010-15*	1.85
2015-20*	1.57
1955-2015	3.34

Source: United Nations, 2013a. * Projections

In short, from a high of 5.77 per cent in the immediate aftermath of the oil boom, the population growth rate has been projected at 1.57 during 2015-20. The corresponding global average during this period is 1.08.

The downward trend in population growth rate can primarily be attributed to the declining fertility rate and low mortality rate. Fertility rate is defined as "the average number of children (live births) a cohort of women would have at the end of their reproductive period if they were subject to the age-specific fertility rates of a given period" (United Nations, 2007: 57-58). It is normally calculated as between the ages of 15 and 49 and is the number of children per woman. The trend of growing population but declining growth rate due to declining fertility is in tune with the theories of demographic transition. It has been established through epidemiological studies that a population's fertility and mortality declines with economic and social development (Notestein, 1945; Blacker, 1947). It is also an indication of social progress and can be observed in many developing societies, as was the case in 19th century Europe and in some Third World countries in the 20th century.

The Arab world has witnessed an overall declining fertility and mortality rates towards the end of the 20th century but the degrees of progression is varied. These countries, in the words of Valentine M. Moghadam, "...are differentially situated along the transition continuum and are characterized by varying levels and combination of mortality and fertility" (Moghadam, 2004: 277). The Saudi case is characterised by a declining fertility and low mortality in a high socioeconomic setting. This is a qualitative change in comparison to the pre-1980s period wherein it was still at the stage of high fertility and declining mortality (Allman, 1980; Mirkin, 2010).

Between 1980 and 2010, the fertility rate in Saudi Arabia declined by about 50 per cent; during 1980-85 it was 7.02 children per woman but declined to 6.22 during 1985-90, 5.55 during 1990-95 and 4.50 during 1995-2000. It fell to 3.55 children per woman during 2000-2005 and between 2005 and 2010 it dropped to only 3.15 children per woman (**Table 4.4**). The fertility rate declined to 2.85 as of 2010-15 and is projected to further decline to 2.59 children per woman during 2015-20. There are a number of factors responsible for this decline and the most important is the changing marital trends and rising education. The other factors include economic prosperity, changing socio-economic condition of women, use of contraceptives or other family planning programmes and improved health facilities. Notably, such a dramatic decline in fertility rate is occurring in a traditional and religious society where preference of more children

and larger families is common (Farrag et al., 1983; Omran, 1992). It brings forth questions regarding Saudi policies and practices on population control and family planning.

Table 4.4: Fertility Rate among Saudi Women

Period	Fertility Rate
1950-55	7.18
1955-60	7.18
1960-65	7.26
1965-70	7.26
1970-75	7.30
1975-80	7.28
1980-85	7.02
1985-90	6.22
1990-95	5.55
1995-2000	4.50
2000-05	3.55
2005-10	3.15
2010-15	2.85
2015-20*	2.59

Source: United Nations, 2015. * Projected

While Saudi authorities do not appear to be directly involved in or encourage family planning or use of contraceptives due to fears of conservative backlash, the United Nations report on *World Population Policies* suggests that the Kingdom indirectly supports family planning and through health services has been able to achieve

substantial gains (United Nations, 2003). The *Millennium Development Goals* (MDGs)[1] that included improvement in condition of women, especially in reproductive health facilities (United Nations, 2000), motivated the authorities to initiate programmes in the areas of maternal and child healthcare which have helped in an overall improvement in health care facilities for women and better awareness regarding birth control thereby contributing to decline in fertility rate (Al Sheeha, 2010).

Family planning and use of contraceptives do not generate public discussion but the need for population control has been discussed in some public forums. The *Majlis al-Shura* twice deliberated and rejected a government plan for population control and the matter was eventually referred to the King and is pending (Ghafour, 2014). This indicates that in certain areas the government has taken lead while the population has responded and benefitted the largesse. Some micro level studies have been conducted among women attending universities and primary health care facilities to understand birth control and contraceptive methods used by them and factors behind the declining fertility rate (Al-Isawi, 1992; Al-Otaiby, 1994; Al-Obaidi, 1995; Al-Nahedh, 1999; Khraif, 2001). These studies remain inconclusive because of lack of a co-ordinated effort to examine the trend but do direct to an increasing acceptance of population control. Though it is difficult to classify or list methods which are 'acceptable' or 'not-acceptable', support for some form of population control could be identified from these works.

Islamic discourses on the issue are varied. Some Shia and Hanafi schools endorse them while Sunni-Wahhabi discourse does not approve of use of contraceptives and family planning as methods for population control. In the past, Wahhabi ulema have spoken against family planning and have issued *fatwa* declaring use of contraceptives and birth control as going against the 'spirit of Islam' (Shaikh, 2003). In 1994, for example, the Kingdom did not participate in the *United Nations International Conference on Population and Development* in Cairo due to pressure from the ulema. The Council of

[1] The eight MDGs include eradication of extreme poverty and hunger, achievement of universal primary education, promotion of gender equality and women empowerment, reduction of child mortality, improvement in maternal health, combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, ensuring environmental sustainability and global partnership for development (United Nations, 2000).

Senior Ulema (*Hai'a Kibar al-Ulema al-Saudiya*) had condemned the conference as a "ferocious assault on Islamic society" (ibid: 105).

Preference for large families has been a distinguishing feature in the Kingdom, mainly attributed to tribal culture and Muslim religious ethos (Farrag et al., 1983) and hence, the use of contraceptives or modern methods of birth control are regarded as non-Islamic. The trend started to change during the second half of the 20th century when many Muslim countries began focusing on developmental issues. The Arab world, including Saudi Arabia, recorded continued high fertility till the 1980s, but subsequently recorded rapid decline mainly due to impacts of "development forces" (Rashad, 2000: 83). Though it remains a less talked about subject in public domain, various forms of family planning and contraceptive usage have been studied and debated by scientific researchers and religious scholars (Omran, 1992; Shaikh, 2003; Salam, 2013). The decline in fertility and limited debate show a degree of popular acceptance of family planning in dealing with demographic challenges. The trend is not country specific but can be noticed in many Muslim societies (Foroutan, 2014; Eberstadt and Shah, 2011) and has to be seen in the context of the erstwhile notion of these societies resisting birth control (Pool, 2012).

The rising trend of use of contraceptives is recognised as one of the major factors for the declining fertility rate in the Kingdom. Contraceptive use has gained some acceptance but varies according to level of education, rural-urban divide and economic prosperity (Al-Otaiby, 1994; Al-Obaidi, 1995; Al Sheeha, 2010). A study conducted by Mounira Al Sheeha (2010) in the Qassim province showed an increasing awareness and acceptance of contraceptive use among women attending the primary health care centres. However, family planning and contraceptive use in the Kingdom is lower than global trends; for example, only one-fifth of married Saudi women in their reproductive years used contraceptives during the late-1990s (Khraif, 2001). Over the years the usage has improved and as of 2010 nearly one-third of the women (married or in-union and within the age group of 15-49) used at least one method of contraception (United Nations, 2012b).

In addition, changing patterns of nuptiality or marital trends have affected the fertility behaviour. It is argued that “age at marriage and woman’s education are the most important determinants of fertility behaviour” among Saudi women (Khraif, 2001: 2). Nuptiality plays an important role in the fertility behaviour and during the period under research, marital trends have undergone significant transformation, both among men and women. Traditionally nuptiality was marked with “early marriage for women, late marriage for men and universal marriage for both sexes” and the rates of polygamous and endogamous marriages were remarkably high (Tabutin and Schoumaker, 2005: 524). Divorce and marital fragility due to the contractual nature of marriage in Islam was another important aspect. These trends had a major impact on the reproductive behaviour leading to high fertility rates in the past. Gradually, however, things started to change remarkably in the 1990s (Salam, 2013), which has been termed as a ‘marital revolution’ in the context of the Arab world (Tabutin and Schoumaker, 2005).

Age at marriage is an important aspect of nuptiality and its upward movement is one of the crucial factors for declining fertility among Saudi women. Teenage marriage, a common phenomenon in many traditional societies, rapidly changed over the past two-three decades. Despite the prevalence of the child marriage, the average age of matrimony for Saudi women has shifted to mid-twenties (Salam, 2013). It happened due to increasing education and awareness but also because the government took steps to curb child marriage including a proposed legislation to set the minimum age of marriage at 18 years for both sexes (Al-Zahiri, 2013). According to the 1992 census data, a total of 6.6 per cent of people married before reaching the age of 20 years; while men constituted a mere 0.7 per cent, female ratio was 12.5 per cent (MoEP, 1992). Similarly, the average age at first marriage for women in the 1980s was 18 years, this rose to 22 years towards the end of 1990s and by the mid-2000s it reached a high of 25 years (Tabutin and Schoumaker, 2005). This high age at marriage for women resulted in increased age of conception thereby reducing the number of active reproduction years, and decreased number of births per women.

Other aspects of nuptiality such as age difference between spouses and polygamous marriages have changed over a period, and impacted the fertility rate. The number of people not entering into marital life ever has increased, especially among women; for

example, in 1992, the number of people who never married in the age group of 25 to 29 years was 20 per cent and was 6 per cent in the age group 30 to 34 years; it however, increased to 30 per cent and 10 per cent respectively as per the 2004 census records (Salam, 2013). This means a shift in female life cycle dedicated to marriage and child bearing and hence the prevalence of more number of women choosing a life beyond marriage and motherhood. It happened primarily because of the prevalence of higher education among women, their increased labour participation and socioeconomic developments such as a decline in polygamous marriages and increase in nuclear families.

Mortality and other Indicators

Another important aspect of the growing population but declining population growth rate has been lower mortality rates. Mortality rate is understood as the number of total deaths per 1,000 individual per year within a given population. It is largely expressed in different variables such as adult mortality rate, maternal mortality rate, under-five mortality rate and infant mortality rate. The most important factors responsible for a decline in net mortality rate are accessibility to better nutrition, availability of food, water and sanitation, behavioural choices and societal contexts that affect the survival of the individual such as health care facilities and quality of life (Mirkin, 2010; United Nations, 2011a). The MDGs envisaged reducing maternal and infant mortality rates and as party to the initiative, Saudi Arabia had to take measures to improve reproductive health facilities leading to rapid decline in the mortality rate (United Nations, 2000).

Since its establishment, the Kingdom has witnessed considerable drop in its mortality rate; the death rate was 23.2 per 1,000 persons in 1950, well above the global average of 19 (United Nations, 2011a; United Nations, 2013a). It was 4.8 per 1,000 in early 1990s, 3.8 during 2000-05 and declined to 3.394 in 2010 (**Table 4.5**), well below the global average of 8.116 (United Nations, 2013a). It means that during the same duration, the Kingdom was able to achieve a faster improvement in probability of life than the rest of the world. However, it should be noted that this may be a result of the ‘baby boom’ and ‘youth bulge’ that led to a change in average age structure of the population. It means a high density of youth population that leads to improvement in mortality as less number of people die of natural causes. Age structure is an important determinant of mortality

and developed countries that have a larger proportion of old people due to lower fertility rate register higher mortality (United Nations, 2015).

Mortality is quantified in terms of indicators such as life expectancy at birth, maternal mortality ratio, infant mortality and under-five mortality that reflect the trend in demographic transition. Life expectancy is defined as: "The average number of years that a newborn could expect to live, if he or she were to pass through life subject to the age-specific death rates of a given period" (United Nations, 2007: 51). It indicates toward expected life-span of an individual in a given population. The average years a person is expected to live in a given society is determined by many factors but it primarily depends on socio-economic development, quality of life and access to health care. Life expectancy among Saudis (both male and female) was 39.9 years in the early 1950s and improved gradually during the 1950s and 1960s, and in the early 1970s rose to 53.9 years and touched 66.3 years by late 1980s (**Table 4.5**). It rose through the 1990s as access to food and water enhanced and medical facilities spread to remote areas, thus, during 2005-10, the life expectancy was recorded at 74.6 years, which was well above the average for West Asia (68.3) or the global average (66) (United Nations, 2013a). It indicates the effective use of the rentier-state welfare mechanism adopted in the Kingdom (discussed in Chapter Three).

Similarly, other indicators such as infant mortality and under-five mortality rates have improved remarkably. Infant mortality rate can be understood as the probability of a child born dying before reaching the age of one (World Health Organisation, 2006). It is argued that infant child health is an important indicator of health conditions in a given society and "crucial to the health of future generations" (Mirkin, 2010: 14). The survivability of a child beyond its first year provides useful insights into the health status of a population as well as the quality and effectiveness of its health services. Infant mortality in Saudi Arabia has declined substantially since the 1950s when it was approximately 200 per 1,000 live births; reached 137 during the 1960s, 77 during the 1970s, 41 during the 1980s and 30 during the early 1990s (**Table 4.5**). By 2005, only 18 child deaths per 1,000 live births were reported before they reach their first year and during 2005-10, infant mortality rate reduced to 14. However, regional variations exist within the Kingdom and because of the disparity in health care facilities urban areas

show better results in comparison to rural and less developed areas (El Mouzan et al., 2009).

Table 4.5: Indicators of Mortality in Saudi Arabia, 1950-2010

Indicators/Year	Mortality rate	Infant mortality rate (both sexes)	Under-five mortality rate both sexes	Life Expectancy at birth		
				Male	Female	Both Sexes
1950-55	23.258	201.933	300	40.0	44.1	41.9
1955-60	21.305	180.955	270	42.5	46.6	44.4
1960-65	19.393	160.618	241	45.0	49.1	47.0
1965-70	16.794	137.486	206	48.3	52.3	50.2
1970-75	13.152	105.276	156	53.6	57.5	55.5
1975-80	9.697	76.948	110	59.0	62.8	60.8
1980-85	7.189	56.201	77	63.3	66.8	64.9
1985-90	5.629	41.148	54	66.4	69.6	67.9
1990-95	4.806	30.404	39	68.3	72.0	69.9
1995-2000	4.281	23.162	28	70.1	73.7	71.6
2000-05	3.793	18.042	21	71.6	75.1	73.1
2005-10	3.394	13.981	15	72.8	77.5	74.3

Sources: United Nations, 2011; and United Nations, 2013a.

Under-five mortality which is defined as the probability of a child born in a specific year or period dying before reaching the age of five (World Health Organisation, 2006)

too has demonstrated improvement. This indicates towards an overall betterment in child health care. The number of deaths per 1,000 before the age of five was very high in the 1950s and gradually declined to 54 deaths by 1990 (**Table 4.5**). At the end of 2010, it was reported to all time low of 15 deaths per 1,000 live births. This is well below the West Asian and global average of 32 and 59 respectively (United Nations, 2013a).

Moreover, maternal mortality rate which is defined as the number of deaths of women during pregnancy or within 42 days of delivery per 100,000 live births (World Health Organisation, 2006) witnessed an overall improvement since the 1990s. Maternal mortality rate was 44 in 1990 and fell to 24 in 2010 (**Table 4.6**). Once again there is a disparity across the social and regional divides. Even within a region, there is variation in rural and urban areas and there are differences between developed provinces such as Mecca and Riyadh and less developed provinces such as Northern Border Province, Qassim and Najran (Shatta, 2004; Al-Ahmadi and Roland, 2005). This variation in different regions is mainly due to lesser penetration of government services, lower access to health facilities and higher number of unassisted deliveries. In addition, evidence suggests that sectarian and ethnic cleavages too play a role in variation in terms of provision of public services and even within a province and region and areas with high concentration of Shias or people of Southern or Northern parts including Yemenis have less public amenities including health care facilities (International Crisis Group, 2005; Human Rights Watch, 2009; Amnesty International, 2013).

Better and widespread primary health care facilities are important factor for the improved demographic indicators, especially in terms of maternal health. As of 2012 Saudi Arabia had around 2,037 primary health care centres, 244 general hospitals and 56 specialised hospitals (MoH, 2012). During 2009-13, a 9.5 per cent increase in number of primary health care centres has been recorded (World Health Organisation, 2013). In addition, as of 2013, Saudi per capita expenditure on health is US$1,681 which is higher than the global average of US$1,041 and of WANA countries at US$311 (World Bank, 2015). According to the World Health Organisation, this along with increase in the number of hospitals, physicians and nursing staff and a new

improved health care strategy has been instrumental in improving the demographic indicators.

Table 4.6: Maternal Mortality Ratio in Saudi Arabia, 1990- 2010

Year	Maternal mortality ratio (per 100,000 live births)
1990	44
1995	33
2000	27
2005	25
2010	24

Source: World Health Organisation, 2014.

In addition to other indicators, age structure constitutes an important dimension of demography. In the West Asian region, particularly in Arab countries age structure is potentially a boon but has also proved to be a major challenge. A young population represents the potential for better economic growth and social progress and if their energy is properly channelized through sound policies the youth bulge could be a demographic dividend (Moghadem, 2004). The regional unrest since the self-immolation of Mohammed Bouazizi in Tunisia in December 2010, however, has proved otherwise and exposed socio-political cleavages and the failure to provide better education and economic opportunities to the youth who were at the forefront of the popular protests. The Saudi situation as discussed later in this chapter is no different from some of these countries and presents a major challenge particularly due to high rate of unemployment among youth and women.

As of 2010, the Arab world was relatively young, with children below the age of 14 years comprising nearly 34 per cent and youth between 15-24 years of age making 20 per cent of the population (**Table 4.7**). The demographic situation in the Kingdom

reflects a similar trajectory; the population is young and 50 per cent of the nationals were below the age of 25 years as of 2010 with children comprising 32 per cent and youth 18 per cent. A mere five per cent of the population is above the age of 60.

Table 4.7: Age Structure in Saudi Arabia, 2010 (in per cent)

	0-14 years	15-24 years	25-59 years	60 years and older
Saudi Arabia	32	18	45	5
Arab Countries	34	20	40	6
World	27	18	44	11

Source: United Nations, 2009.

The phenomenon referred to as 'youth-bulge' in Saudi Arabia is a result of rapid economic growth, 'baby boom' of the 1970s and 1980s, better health care facilities and accessibility and decline in child mortality. Nearly 45 per cent of the national population is in the working-age group of 25-59 years, thus, the burden-dividend share or the dependency ratio is favourable. As of 2010, the dependency ratio[2] was 103.8 per 100 persons of working age and in 2015 it declined to 88.9. It is further projected to drop to 86.3 by 2020 (United Nations, 2015). The high ratio of youth has been a major feature of the demographic transition and as per estimates in 2015 nearly 66 per cent of the Saudi population is in the 15-59 age group and those in 15-40 age group comprise nearly 35 per cent (ibid). This is an interesting scenario because a young population is regarded as engine of economic growth and social progress (United Nations, 2011b). The Kingdom is at a crucial stage of development whereby the population is relatively young and the system has wealth to invest in training human resource development. This demographic feature exerts immense pressure on the system to bring reforms and deliver on the aspirations of the youthful as discussed subsequently in this chapter.

[2] If dependency ratio is calculated as ratio of population aged 0-24 and 65 plus per 100 population of 25-64.

In addition, ageing or the number of elderly population is recognised as an important aspect of demography, partly because of its dependency character. Saudi population largely comprises of youth but the number of elderly people is also rising; for example, in 1992 3.2 per cent of the population was above 60, it rose to 3.5 per cent in 2004 and 5 per cent by 2010 (MoEP, 1992; MoEP, 2004; and MoEP, 2010). Estimates suggest that the number of elderly population would increase further and by 2030, nearly 6.5 per cent and by 2050 approximately 13 per cent of the population would be above 65 years (United Nations, 2013a). This is a huge number and poses socio-economic challenges for the Kingdom as this elderly dependent population would not contribute to the production process (Al-Gabbani, 2008).

Urbanisation

Another important dimension of the demographic feature is the predominant urban population.[3] The United Nations (2012a) data reveals that global urban and rural population achieved parity for the first time in history in 2008 as a result of rapid urbanisation mainly in less developed areas. The Arab world too has undergone fast urbanisation and as of 2010 nearly 50 per cent of its population lived in urban areas (Mirkin, 2010). According to some estimates, the WANA region is the second most urbanised regions in the developing world after Latin America (Moghadam, 2004). The GCC countries have urbanised faster and the rate has been more rapid in smaller states such as Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain and the UAE than in Saudi Arabia and Oman (United Nations, 2012a). It was not just the physical aspect of geography but environmental, historical and socio-economic factors were equally important in the urban trajectory of Saudi Arabia and Oman (Fuccaro, 2001).

Nevertheless, rapid urbanisation is an important demographic feature in Saudi Arabia and as of 2014 it was the fifth most urbanised countries in the WANA region after Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain and the UAE. Urbanisation started soon after its establishment

[3] The differentiation between urban and rural varies according to the context; for example in industrialized countries, it largely depends on concentration of population but in developing countries it largely depends on the different ways of rural and urban life with urban areas usually providing a higher standard of living (United Nations, 2013b). With rapid demographic changes this has become blurred and new classifications are used to define rural and urban depending on local and regional variation. This research uses United Nations statistics on urbanization which depends on classification of local administrative areas as urban or rural.

and commercial production of oil and as petroleum industry and aligned services and trade grew, the rate of urbanisation increased; for example, in 1950, just over 21 per cent of the population was urban and after the oil boom it grew at the rate of approximately six per cent annually (United Nations, 2012a). Thus, the urban population reached 65.9 per cent in 1980 and 76.8 per cent by 1990 but the growth rate dropped to three per cent annually during 1991 and 2010 because of stagnation in growth of cities (ibid). Despite of the slowdown, 82.1 per cent of the nationals were living in urban centres in 2010 (**Table 4.8**) and it is projected that by 2050 nearly 90 per cent of the Saudi population would reside in urban areas (ibid). As a result only 18 per cent of the total population lived in rural areas as of 2010 and this decline was driven by economic factors whereas in countries such as Iraq, Yemen, Syria, Jordan and Sudan, internal migration was propelled due to conflicts and other crises.[4]

Urbanisation has shifted the nature of the society in terms of its demographic and structural aspects, leading to smaller household and families. It has led to lesser interactions among the family due to the nature of work people are engaged in and absence of large family gatherings that were an important feature of the traditional rural lifestyle. It has affected the lifestyle choices in terms of dress, modes of transport and gender relationship within families because urban spaces are qualitatively different from a nomadic lifestyle as discussed in Chapter Five. In maintaining the segregation of sexes in public life, the situation has become more defined and restricted because of imposition of Wahhabi code of conduct. For example, previously in nomadic or semi-nomadic life, women did not face restrictions in moving out of the household for basic needs nor were they prevented from riding camel or using other modes of transport (Katakura, 1977; Altorki and Cole, 1989); however, economic prosperity and increased urbanisation have led to restrictions on movement of women. In some ways, this came to symbolise the urban life and only recently, some women have used the social media to debate the restrictions regarding their physical movements (discussed in Chapter Six).

[4] According to Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, as of 2012 the region had nearly 6 million internally displaced people (IDPs) which was a 40 per cent rise from 2011 when it was 4.3 million (Lennard 2013).

Table 4.8: Urban Population in Saudi Arabia, 1950-2010

Year	Population in Urban Areas (in per cent)
1950	21.3
1955	26.0
1960	31.3
1965	38.8
1970	48.7
1975	58.3
1980	65.9
1985	72.6
1990	76.8
1995	78.7
2000	79.8
2005	81.0
2010	82.1

Source: United Nations, 2012a.

Urbanisation fuels expansion of existing cities or emergence of newer centres to accommodate the constant flow of rural-urban migrants in search of better livelihood. In the 1930s and 1940s, only a few cities with rudimentary urban infrastructure existed and Jeddah, a port city and the main trading centre was the biggest city. Mecca, Medina and Taif were other smaller cities in Hejaz region because of the religious significance of the first two, and due to agriculture in case of the latter. In 1935, Riyadh—the capital—was still a non-descript town with small walled township of 40,000 people (Al-Naim, 2008). The situation changed following oil exploration and expansion of government and administration. While Riyadh and Jeddah grew exponentially, other urban centres started to develop, most importantly the cities of Hasa and Dammam due to oil

production that attracted a large migrant workforce from less developed parts of the Kingdom as well as from overseas (Lipsky, 1959).

By 1950s Saudi Arabia witnessed “the transformation of the urban landscape of many historical settlements that had religious, political, and commercial functions (especially Mecca, Medina, Riyadh, and Jeddah)” (Fuccaro, 2001: 177). New urban centres started to develop around existing urban locales riding the wave of ambitious economic development plans but it also gave rise to issues including the problem of “increasingly centralised urban-planning and land-control policies” (ibid). The problem was more a product of administrative system as regional bureaucratic systems had not yet taken roots. Administration was centralised and was reflected in urbanisation process but started to change gradually with establishment and expansion of regional administrative structures. During the 1970s and 1980s, a number of middle-level quasi-urban centres started to grow into bigger townships. The growth of cities both in terms of their expanse and infrastructure accelerated since the 1990s due to special focus on these areas and a fresh wave of economic growth. As a result of development programmes and rapid internal as well as external migration the number of cities grew and in addition to Riyadh and Jeddah which had more than one million residents in 2001, smaller cities such as Khobar, Buraidah, Khamis Mushait, Tabuk, Hail, Najran and Qatif became prominent urban centres (United Nations, 2012a).

Urbanisation, though puts strains on the city resources, it is indeed a “key aspect of social change and of economic development” (Moghadam, 2004: 275). Economic growth is recognised as the most important factor for rapid urbanisation and is evident in the Saudi case as well. The transformation from agriculture and farming based rural economy to oil and petroleum based urban economy fuelled partly by internal migration from rural to urban areas; limited natural resources and lack of economic opportunities became the push factor for rural dwellers while the lure of a better life and economic opportunities in urban areas became the pull factors (Omran and Roudi, 1993). Better infrastructure and services in urban areas too were a major factor for rural populace migrating to newer areas. Cities attracted more government funds as part of development plans and growth strategies, which in turn enlarged the urban population.

It has been argued that the rapid urbanisation has partly been facilitated by the nomadic lifestyle that prevailed in the Peninsula. Factors such as economic growth, wealth, resources, facilities, services etc are important determinants of urbanisation but in the Saudi case, migration was also induced by the nomadic lifestyle and harsh climatic conditions (Khateeb, 1981). Countries which had a predominant settled lifestyle or were largely village based did not witness rapid urbanisation despite economic growth because of a sense of belongingness to the soil preventing large scale migration. People were socially, economically and even emotionally connected to the land and hence were not prepared to migrate unless forced by natural calamities or wars. This however, was not the case in Saudi Arabia where rural subsistence was meagre and harsh.

While urbanisation has a causal relationship with migration, it has a consequential relation as well; migration leads to urbanisation and rapid urban growth attracts more migrants thereby increasing the rate of migration (Moghadam, 2004). The process of migration expedites not only due to the rapid growth of urban centres but also due to the lacklustre prospect of growth in rural areas. This cyclic process puts pressure on the existing urban infrastructure and poses new challenges; the most important is slowing the flow through infrastructural development and economic opportunities in rural areas. The failure of state to provide housing and other basic amenities for urban poor who mainly constitute the first generation of internal migrants has given rise to urban slums in the Third World and West Asian cities such as Cairo, Tehran, Algiers, Tripoli etc, which suffer from these problems. In Saudi case this problem is not acute but issues such as lack of economic opportunities and services to the growing urban population exist. It has been argued that the absence of urban slums in Riyadh, Jeddah and other big Saudi cities are more due to traditional tribal networks rather than the efficiency of authorities (Omran and Roudi, 1993).

Internal migration and urbanisation had an immense effect on the lifestyle, social organisation and interaction and food habits. Earlier lives were organised around oases, pastoral lands, wells and springs and people lived in camps and were dependent on dates and wheat and barley flours and meat largely comprised of beef and lambs. With rapid urbanisation lives were organised around industries, market places and government offices. It affected food choices and as wealth facilitated large scale imports

of rice that replaced wheat as staple cereals, vegetables and various varieties of non-indigenous fruits became integral part of urban Saudi food habits while chicken replaced beef as staple meat (Al-Askar, 2014). Urbanisation led to increased inter-tribal interactions. It impacted women who previously participated in physical labour, helped the men in agriculture and farming and went out of household to fetch water, fuel and food stuff (Al-Ghamdi, 1989). The urban lifestyle made these vocations irrelevant and women became confined to household. As discussed in Chapter Six, this situation began changing only after women's education gained wider acceptance.

Of the total internal migrants, Riyadh, Mecca and Eastern Province that had witnessed better economic growth attracted a substantial proportion; for example since the 1990s 70.4 per cent of internal migrants have settled in these three provinces. On the other hand remote provinces of Jazan, Baha, Asir and Qassim that did not benefit from economic growth were the main source of these migrant. As much as 77.98 per cent of the internal migrants originated from these four less developed provinces (Al-Humaidi, 2003). The majority of these migrants comprised of youth (25-29 age group), while nearly an identical proportion of men (50.94 per cent) and women (49.06 per cent) migrated (ibid). It shows that while the internal migrants were largely youth, they brought their wives and children and women migrated not for work but as part of family.

The religious profile of the resident population presents an interesting picture. The national population is predominantly Sunni Muslim but contains a substantial Shia minority estimated to be 10-15 per cent and is largely concentrated in the Eastern Province, Qatif and Najran (International Crisis Group, 2005). The majority of Shias of Saudi Arabia are the adherents of *Ithna Ashari* (Twelver), while a small population of 100,000 Islmailis live in Najran. The expatriate population is more diverse and consists of a large number of Christians, Hindus and Buddhists belonging to Arab, African, South Asian and South East Asian countries. Saudi Arabia does not publish the religious distribution of its expatriate population, thus accurate figures are difficult to find.

Table 4.9: Regional Distribution of Nationals in Saudi Arabia, 2010

Provinces	Male	Female	Sex Ratio (female per 1,000 male)	Total	Per cent
Riyadh	2,220,727	2,076,018	934	4,296,745	22.97
Mecca	2,085,813	2,030,252	973	4,116,065	22.00
Medina	635,046	627,466	988	1,262,512	6.75
Qaseem	470,490	458,001	973	928,491	4.96
Eastern Province	1,498,898	1,392,217	928	2,891,115	15.45
Asir	790,229	800,618	1,013	1,590,847	8.50
Tabuk	339,450	321,703	947	661,153	3.53
Hail	242,305	244,899	1,010	487,204	2.60
Northern Borders	134,622	133,555	992	268,177	1.43
Jazan	559,898	545,197	973	1,105,095	5.91
Najran	202,977	199,447	982	402,424	2.15
Baha	169,339	179,297	1,058	348,636	1.86
Jouf	177,379	171,733	968	349,112	1.87
Total	**9,527,173**	**9,180,403**	**963**	**18,707,576**	**100**

Source: MoEP, 2010.

The province-wise population distribution is also uneven and has been affected by three trends, namely, natural growth, urbanisation-induced migration and oil-driven expatriate

influx. The highly urbanised and populous provinces such as Mecca and Riyadh have witnessed exponential population growth while in Jazan, Northern Borders, Tabuk, Najran and Baha provinces the population growth is slow. According to the 2010 census records, nearly 65 per cent of the national population is concentrated in the four major provinces of Riyadh, Mecca, Medina and Eastern Province. On the other hand, the less urbanised and industrialised regions of Baha, Jouf and Northern Borders have less than 2 per cent of the local population each (**Table 4.9**). One can also see the trend that provinces such as Asir, Hail, Northern Borders and Baha that have been the major sources of internal migrants have a higher sex ratio while provinces such as Riyadh and Eastern Province which are attracted the largest share of the internal migrants have lower sex ratio compared to the national average of 963 (**Table 4.9**).

Demographic Challenges

Changing demography have created different sets of challenges in Saudi Arabia; one relates to the exponential population growth and a high concentration of expatriate population both of which put pressure on enhancing the existing infrastructure. Another set of challenges emanates from the large proportion of youth population and have created issues such as human resource development and high rate of unemployment among educated. Third sets of issues pertain to lifestyle such as rising instances of drug-abuse, crime among the youth and lack of recreational activities due to restrictive religious and cultural atmosphere. Persisting social inequalities, rural-urban divide and urban poor are compounded by the lack of national expertise in dealing with them. These problems, however, are not unique to the Kingdom and inability of many Arab regimes to effectively deal with them has been one of the root causes of the Arab Spring.

The most important demographic challenge facing Saudi Arabia has been the need to provide universal health care and education and a degree of success has been achieved in these two spheres. As of 2012 there are around 2,037 primary health care centres, 244 general hospitals and 56 specialised hospitals (MoH, 2012). The per capita expenditure on health for 2013 at US$1,681 is higher than global average of US$1,041 and its annual expenditure on health is 3.2 per cent of its GDP (World Health Organisation,

2013). At the same time, the health system and health care personnel have improved substantially in the last two decades with better access to primary health care facilities and increased number of hospitals (Albejaidi, 2010). As of 2013 the Kingdom had more than 120 health professionals and 22 hospital beds for every 10,000 individuals (MoH, 2013) while the global average is 53 and 30 respectively (World Bank, 2015).

Similarly, the number of educational facilities both at school and higher levels has witnessed a massive improvement since during the last two decades. The Kingdom has more than 35,000 girl's and boy's schools (MoE, 2014), nearly 150 vocational institutions and professional colleges (TVTC, 2011) and more than 50 public and private universities (MHE, 2010a). In addition, there is a vast network of private schools that impart education to Saudis, largely to higher strata of the society as well as to the expatriate population. This is a massive expansion when compared to around 16,000 schools in 1990 and 27,000 in 2000. The total number of students enrolled in these schools in 2013-14 was 5,441,480 taught by 531,553 teachers, reflecting– a healthy teacher-student ratio of 1:10 (MoH, 2014).

The Kingdom has achieved 97 per cent net enrolment rate at primary school as of 2013 and the total literacy rate of 95 per cent and is close to achieving universal primary education. Further, it records nearly 100 per cent enrolment at the secondary level, which is much higher than the global average of 75 per cent (UIS, 2012). The number of students graduating from these colleges and universities witnessed a 400 per cent rise by the late 2000s in comparison to a decade earlier (MHE, 2009). The expenditure on education has been consistently high and nearly 5 per cent of the GDP had been spent on education sector between 2010 and 2014 (MoE, 2014). A thrust on improving female access to education in this period has resulted in girls (60 per cent) outnumbering male school and university graduates (MHE, 2013a). Similarly, the number of women going abroad for higher education has witnessed a rise and as of 2014, nearly 25 per cent of Saudi student studying abroad were women (MHE, 2013b).

Despite the expansion in the educational infrastructure, the quality of human resource in terms of education and training continues to be poor (Looney, 1991; Prokop, 2003). Efforts such as teacher's training programmes, public education development

programme, revision of curriculum and a focus on emerging disciplines in science and technology, business, finance, management and administration have achieved limited success (Bahgat, 1999; Rugh, 2002; Bosbait and Wilson, 2005; Achoui, 2009). Education reforms have been a thrust area but the problem of disparity between market requirements and availability of skills persist (Mellahi, 2000; Al-Aqil, 2005; Al-Eisa, 2009). For example, as of 2014, Saudis constitute only 22 per cent of the private sector work force and the number of female in the private sector is even lower (MoEP, 2015; Naffee, 2015).

One of the reasons for the lack of skilled manpower is the recent nature of economic growth and urban-based economy and people are yet to become acclimatised to these sudden changes (Algosaibi, 1995). Further, the changes spurred by economic growth were the result of top-down initiatives that have created a client-patron relationship between the ruler and the population. The population has not become a stake-holder in the process of development but remained as a consumer of the fruits of development (Hertog, 2010; Thomson, 2014). The idea that domestic skills are needed to drive socio-economic growth and progress is yet to percolate to the masses or become commonplace. The economic growth that started in the 1950s and witnessed a massive expansion in the 1970s started to create consciousness regarding the need to sustain this growth in 1980s and 1990s and even though the government took measures to improve infrastructure, the consciousness about the need for skill development for a sustainable economic growth is yet to take deep social roots (Algosaibi, 1995).

The high per cent of youth population or the ‘youth bulge’ has created a variety of challenges, the most important being providing job opportunities. The rate of unemployment is significantly high among youth and women; overall unemployment rate among nationals was 11.2 per cent in 2010, but was much higher among youth (20-25 years of age); youth unemployment was 15 per cent in 2000, rose to 30 per cent 2009-10 and has increased to a staggering 45 per cent as of 2015 (International Labour Organisation, 2011; Chabaan, 2009; MoEP, 2015). Unemployment among educated women is even higher and was 30.6 per cent as of 2010 (MoEP, 2010). As of 2015, the national rate of unemployment stood at 11.6 per cent but was 32.8 per cent for women (MoEP, 2015). Female participation in the workforce has been marginal and in 2005

they accounted for 7.6 per cent of the national labour force and this has slightly increased to 20 per cent (17.5 per cent Saudis) in 2015 (MHE, 2010b). This growth is not commensurate to the increase in the number of educated women (Chabaan, 2009). For example, the number of women graduates from universities has increased to 60 per cent in 2013 from less than 40 per cent in 1980s (MHE, 2013a). Their enrolment in non-traditional courses and training and technical institutions also increased since 2005; however, Saudi female participation in the labour force remains lower (17.5 per cent) than other GCC countries (43 per cent) (MoEP, 2015).

One view regarding large-scale unemployment among locals is the perceived preference for cheaper expatriate labour by the private sector. Efforts at Saudisation of the labour force and limit the number of expatriates have met with limited success. Towards improving the job prospects of Saudis in the private sector a programme was launched in the mid-1990s but it largely failed due to lack of quality local human resource (Bahgat, 1999; Rugh, 2002; Bosbait and Wilson, 2005). In 2011, the government re-launched the nationalisation of labour force called *Nitaqat* (ranges) that has helped in improving the share of Saudis in the private sector and as a result in 2012-13, nearly 11 per cent of employees in private owned local and multi-national companies were Saudi nationals (MoL, 2013; Peck, 2014).

A large proportion of youth population indicates better productive capacity but it requires optimum utilisation of the human resource. This is an ideal situation for countries with good human resource development record and diverse economy to absorb the increasing labour force and Kingdom does not fall into this category. It faces a twin-problem of linear economic growth and high dependence on labour incentive service sector that prefers skilled but cheaper expatriate manpower. One of the steps to deal with the situation has been economic diversification but it has had only limited success (Ramady, 2005).

The rentier-nature of the economy, problems of youth unemployment and failure to meet the market demands for skilled human resources internally have created pressure for reforms; some manifest in the form of demands for opening of the economy and others through the demand of greater employment opportunities for fresh female

graduates (MHE, 2010b; Murphy, 2011). Moreover, thanks to globalization the youth are increasingly exposed and are connected with the outside world and are gaining the awareness about participatory public life, individual freedom, human rights, practice of faith and so on. These in turn are creating palpable resentments against the closed socio-political environment.

Lack of freedom and individual space and rising social pressure have given rise to other problems such as wayward behaviours, drug abuse or seeking dangerous and risky recreations are on the rise (Menoret, 2014). Social and economic pressures have pushed many youth towards criminal activities and many new migrants to cities resort to begging to stay alive. A number of Bedouins in urban centres such as Riyadh, Jeddah, Khobar, Tabuk and Yanbu are engaged in menial works such as ferrying taxis and local buses, professions once dominated by the expatriate workers (Menoret, 2014; Quamar, 2014-15).

As urbanised life became the norm and families started to disintegrate into urban-based nuclear units, old behaviour and activities underwent change. Traditional recreational activities such as family meetings, evening *majalis*, camel and horse riding, hunting etc became rarer. At the same time newer means did not replace the old because of controlled way of life and lack of acceptability of music, films and other such activities that provide recreations opportunities in modernised societies. In other words, urban popular cultural activities are maintained under a religion-controlled and less tolerant environment thereby leading to signs of way-ward behaviour among the youth.

The rampant urbanisation and industrialisation leading to environmental degradation and destruction of local habitats (Taher and Al-Hajjar, 2014; Alshehry, 2015) and the prolonged and continuing economic, political and cultural marginalisations have created problems and unrest among the Shias in Hasa and Qatif who did not benefit from the oil wealth (Al-Rasheed, 1998; Jones, 2006). It led to emergence of Shia organisations demanding a share in the fruits of development and in the late 1970s and 1980s these demands turned violent. One such organisation was *Hizbullah al-Hijaz* (The Party of God in Hejaz) that was formed in 1987 and was modelled on the lines of Lebanese militant organisation Hezbollah. It advocated violence as a means of achieving the

rights for Shias and was engaged in a number of violent attacks inside the Kingdom (Matthiesen, 2010). Gradually, the leadership and the larger community recognised the need for peaceful methods for realizing their goals and since the 1990s have been demanding an end to discrimination against them through petitions and other 'acceptable' means (Fandy, 2009; Kéchichian, 2013).

The unabated internal and international migration has put pressure on urban infrastructure while continuous neglect of rural areas in allocation of development programmes has created the problem of rural-urban divide. This is mainly the result of lack of economic opportunities in rural areas and failure of the economic diversification efforts. Basic facilities and services are largely concentrated in urban areas and rural areas suffer from the shortages of drinking water, electricity, medical care, educational facilities and most importantly employment opportunities (Al-Rabdi, 2005).

In addition, social inequalities persist despite the opportunities for socio-economic mobility, oil wealth and economic growth. They largely manifest in the class based divisions and is largely understood in terms of economic prosperity even though traditional notions of hierarchy based in descent, tribal affiliations, familial ties, religiosity etc have not diminished completely. It is argued that the trajectory of financial attainment runs across the same traditional lines leading to emergence of newer notions of social inequalities (Fandy, 2009). It means that those who had a privileged status first benefitted from the economic growth and prosperity propelled by oil wealth and those who had subordinated positions due to lack of access and other traditional factors continued to lag behind in terms of access to wealth.

This continuation of social inequality had various manifestations and cut across regional, sectarian and tribal associations but the most underprivileged group is the urban poor. They are mainly the recent migrants from rural areas and are not educated and depend heavily on government largesse for survival. Similarly, Shias have been less privileged and continue to face discrimination in terms of resource allocation and employment opportunities. Due to huge influx of expatriate workers from Arab, South Asian and Southeast Asian countries, a class division exists along these lines. While wealthy Saudis constitute the higher echelons of the social hierarchy, Western expats

from UK, US and other ‘First World’ countries are respected and given higher salaries for the same work. Arabs or native Arabic speakers constitute the second layer among the expatriates while Asian and African workers form the lowest echelons and are paid much less in comparison to others for the similar job profile. Socioeconomic discrimination against poor Asian and African workers is rampant and in most instances these workers find it difficult to come out of exploitative situations. Crime against women and exploitation of household workers is rampant and local authorities try to settle issues in favour Saudi accused (Human Rights Watch, 2004).

Conclusion

Demographic transition is an important aspect of the social change and indicates the evolving nature and characteristics of Saudi society. The demographic changes underline that the society is going through a phase of transition impacting all aspects of the temporal life. It follows a parallel trajectory to the socioeconomic developments and improved standard of life along with better health care and educational facilities and choices for livelihood. Demographic indicators have recorded improvement since the 1990s due to an emphasis on welfare measures echoing the ‘social contract’ between the ruling family and the population. Signs of progress are visible in terms of declining fertility, low mortality leading to a slowdown on population growth rate and better health care especially for children and women.

At the same time, longevity and hence absolute population growth, rapid urbanisation and a large pool of unemployed youth pose political, economic and social challenges. In addition, the presence of a large expatriate population has become a major issue due to rising unemployment among local youth and women. Changes in the structural aspects have followed demographic transition and its impact is felt on. The social organisation is marked with a near-total settled population, massive urbanisation and high standard of living together with stabilisation of class hierarchies. Together with these demographic changes induced primarily by modernization and economic development, the Saudi society also witnessed far reaching changes in the social structure leading to impacts on social organisation, identity formation and social stratification. At the same time the demography has profoundly affected the social institutions such as family,

marriage, kinship and ethnic relations and these structural issues would be discussed Chapter Five.

Chapter Five

Social Structure: Family, Tribe and the Society

Social structure can be defined as the basic characteristics of collective existence and represents the institutionalised pattern of the society based in continuity of tradition, customs and characteristic features (Radcliffe-Brown, 1940; Parsons, 1966). Individual societies have unique structural features, which define and dominate their characteristics and in the Arabian Peninsula, in particular in Saudi Arabia, tribal structure defines them. This tribal characteristic makes family and kinship ties a significant factor in all aspects of Saudi life and is reflected in its political system, economy and culture (Niblock, 1982; Hourani, 1990; Kostiner, 1990; Kour, 1991; Billingsley, 2010; Tibi, 1990b; Samin, 2015). This in turn makes descent and genealogy a defining feature of the society and in the words of Anthony Billingsley, "Indeed, dynasticism and family solidarity are pervasive features of Arab society and can be identified as underpinning many aspects of Arab political, social and commercial behaviour" (Billingsley, 2010: 4).

While retaining their characteristic features, societies evolve and undergo transformation, understood as social change. As discussed in Chapter Four, Saudi society has undergone changes due to its evolution from a nomadic and rural community to a predominantly settled and urban society. This process of change was largely as a result of state-induced efforts at political and economic transformation. Rapid industrialization, urbanisation and migration forced and facilitated frequent interactions, increased mobility and provided greater access to wealth. This opened newer avenues for people with different backgrounds and identities to engage and intermingle with those belonging to other regions, clans and tribes. It affected the nature of the social structure while retaining its tribal characteristics. As a result, the relationships between individuals and institutions such as family, marriage and kinship and mode of their interactions changed, thus impacting individuals' lives. The changing nature of the society further affected the process of identity formation, ethnic and

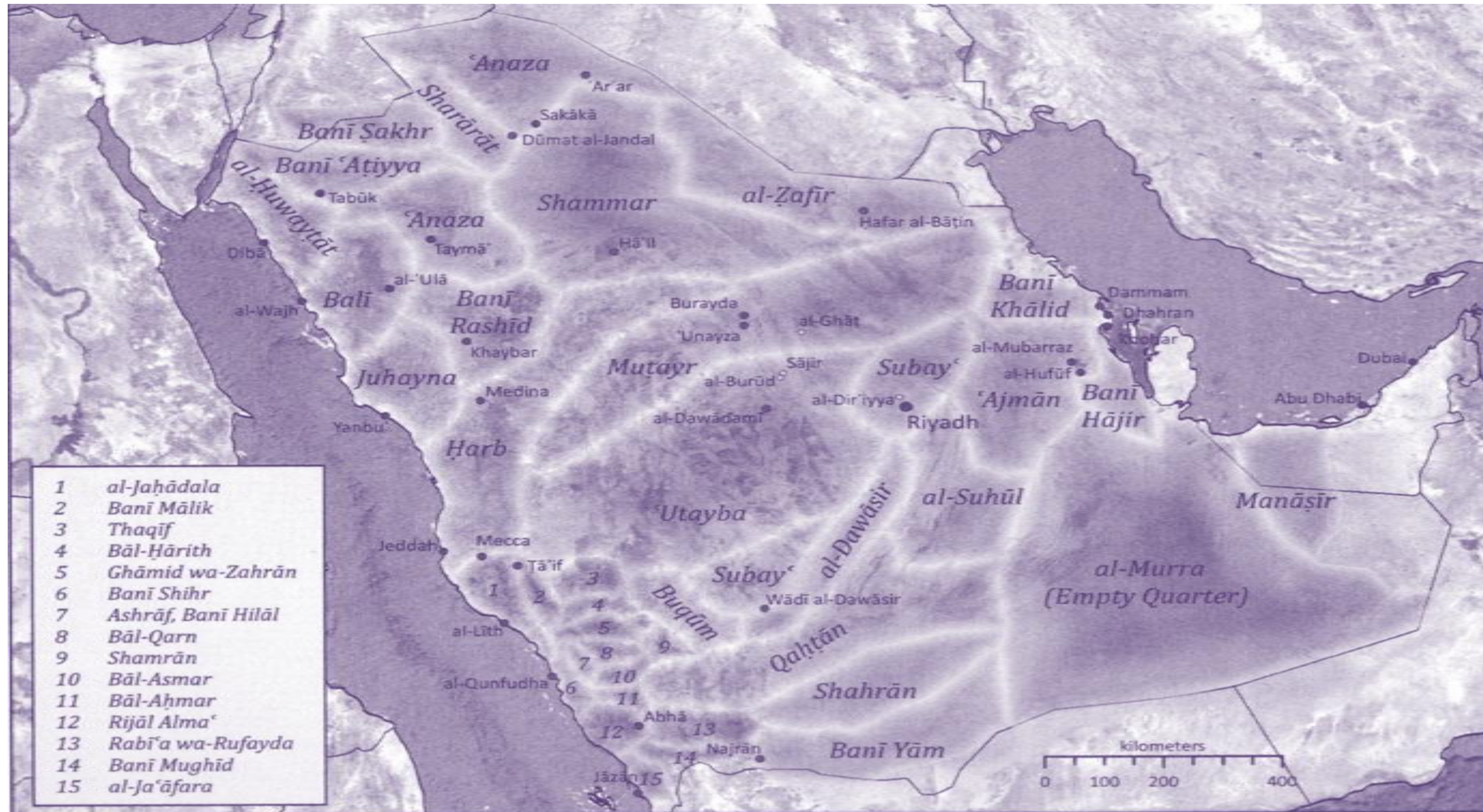
sectarian divisions and social mobility and thus resulted in the formation of class-based stratification (Allman, 1980; Niblock, 1982; Altorki and Cole, 1989; and Khoury and Kostiner, 1990). Impacts on culture and traditions, however, were limited because of many factors but most importantly due to the predominance of the conservative sections on the state and social structures.

This chapter analyses the changing nature of Saudi society while underlining the continuing significance of tribe and family. It is divided into three sections; first examines the significance of tribe and how despite the changing nature of tribal relations and its functions, it has retained its socio-political significance. It further analyses two significant outcomes of the changing nature of the tribal society, namely, the formation of new identities and emergence of class-based social stratification. Second section examines institutions such as family, marriage and kinship, changes they have undergone and how they impact the status of individuals, especially the elderly and youth. In the final section, the chapter discusses the impact of these changes on the traditional value system, an area of contestation in Saudi debate on 'modernisation'.

Tribal Social System

A tribe is composed of several clans of same descent and a clan is composed of several branch families. For centuries, the Arabian Peninsula has largely been a tribal society and tribes are the most important mode of social organisation. People organised on the basis of descent and tribal affiliations and it was the primary unit for political, economic and social function (Kour, 1991; Kostiner, 1993). Among the innumerable tribes who were living in different parts of the peninsular desert, a few large tribes such as Anza, Mutayr, Qahtan, Utaiba, Murrah, Shammar, Harb, Dawasir, Ajman, Subay and Suhul were dominant and influential. They wielded power, owned resources and moved freely from one part to another in search of food, water and grazing lands (Al-Harbi, 2011; Samin, 2015). As Joseph Kostiner states, "In the early years of the twentieth century Saudi society was divided into large tribal groups that maintained a corporate life and inhabited different regions in the central and northern Arabian Peninsula" (Kostiner, 1990: 226).

Figure 5.1: Approximate Boundaries of Tribal Territories in Arabian Peninsula in early 20th century



Source: Nadav Samin (2015), p. xiv.

The tribes lived a nomadic life and were aligned with various chieftaincies ruled by prominent families or clans; for example, al-Saud family controlled Utaiba, Subay and Mutayr tribes and the al-Rashid family controlled the Shammar tribe. Except in the Hejaz region that was urban and hence had a mixed population, the tribal confederations lived within a specific region with a loosely demarcated territory (**Figure 5.1**). In the past, tribes were self-sufficient and engaged in various economic activities, owned assets such animals and pastoral lands and collectively guarded them against invaders or rival groups. The geographical feature of the region made water sources such as wells and oases as prime properties and were fiercely guarded by tribes that owned them. Tribes were and continue to be patriarchal in nature and hence the eldest male member of the ruling family or clan is regarded as its head (Kour, 1991; Samin, 2015).

Historically, descent was an important marker of social differentiation and hierarchy and it continues to be so, thus, those belonging to the 'original Arab' (*Arab al-Asl*) tribes or those claiming descent from the Prophet's family (*Ashraaf*) form the higher echelons in the society. On the other hand, those who come from non-tribal origin and non-Arab descent and were Arabised (*Arab al-Areba*) in due course of time were regarded as lower (Taqoush, 2009). Latter group mainly comprised of artisan and tradesmen of *Farsi* (Persian), *Hadrami* (people from Southern Arabia), *Hindi* (Indian), *Habshi* (African) and *Indunesi* (Southeast Asian) origins. This division has somewhat become diluted in contemporary times but had resonated sharply until oil-induced economic transformation changed the face of the society. Salwa al-Khateeb (2007) argues that before the advent of oil, Saudis can be categorised into four groups based on their hierarchy; most respected were tribal leaders or *sheikhs* who were rich and wealthy and wielded power; the second rung were *qabayali*, those who belonged to pure Arab tribes; the third category were those who traced non-Arab origins and were immigrants; and the fourth were slaves. The main difference between those who belonged to tribes and those who were immigrants rested on their occupation. The *qabayali* people detested occupation such as carpentry, blacksmith, butchering etc., while the rich tribals owned slaves for manual works such as herding animals and harvesting fruits.

These arrangements were based on customary laws and were followed for centuries. All constituent members of a tribe accepted the supremacy of the ruling family, and in the

process, came under the protection of the latter. Harmonious coexistence was not always the norm and there were problems, competitions and skirmishes over control of resources and competing claims not only against other tribes but also within a tribe among individuals, families and clans. As a result, change of allegiance from one leader or *sheikh* and alliance with another was normal ascribing fluidity to tribal alignments (Kostiner, 1993). The chieftaincies competed with each other for supremacy and survival. The majority of the tribes were nomadic and roamed in different parts in search of pastoral lands and water and wandered through seasons in Najd, Qassim, Hail, Asir and Hasa regions. There were small townships such as Riyadh and Abha with small settled population. Hejaz was the only region with a large settled population. The coastal regions along the Gulf had small fishing communities who thrived on marine life and had limited contacts with the interior areas.

The nature and characteristic of tribal life started to change with the establishment of the Kingdom as the population was unified under a central authority which many resented but could not resist. The discovery and commercial production of oil and the subsequent oil boom, economic growth and modernisation inevitably changed the nature of the tribal existence and it is argued that "Few societies have undergone as rapid a material transformation as Saudi Arabia in the twentieth century" (Samin, 2015: 4). The most important aspect of change in the tribal social organisation was a complete transformation from a nomadic to a settled population (Al-Khateeb, 1981; Fabietti, 1982).

In the beginning, people largely organised themselves according to tribal affiliations and chose to settle down in a specific village or township and were rewarded with economic opportunities by the state. This was done to consolidate the state and gain loyalty of tribes. Subsequently, this changed due to migration and increasing urbanisation as people moved from one place to another for education, employment and for better economic opportunities and services. As a result, tribal bonds and belongings became weaker and in the words of Nadav Samin,

> ... the steady expansion of the state into the traditional domains of the tribe, the provisioning of economic goods and physical security, has largely eliminated the tribal system's raison d'être. Yet the idea of the tribe and tribal belonging has persisted strongly in the Saudi imagination (Samin, 2015: 6).

In the process of modernisation, the tribe has disintegrated so far as its social, economic and political functions were concerned but it remains an important marker of identity.

The contemporary patterns of the Saudi society are remarkably different from the past. The population is predominantly urban leading to near disappearance of tribal and clan-based sustenance. Tribal networks have become less important but continue to have a role in the social structure particularly in matters of marriage. With 85-90 per cent population living in urban areas and changing modes of consumption, the tribal set up witnessed changes. Historically, tribes were the basis of economic, political and social organisation but due to modernisation the tribal basis of economic organisation became obsolete. Politically tribal association remains important, particularly in terms of leadership and negotiations with the state but the political system has vastly changed due to the 'unification' under al-Saud rule (Khoury and Kostiner, 1990). Tribal network are important in terms of decision to migrate, settle, in choosing occupation and in marital choices and descent continue to be an important marker for identity. As Samin states, "Despite the erosion of kinship ties resulting from almost three centuries of religious conditioning, and despite the unprecedented material transformation of Saudi society in the oil age, genealogy remains a central facet of modern Saudi identity" (Samin, 2015: 2). He further articulates that the emphasis on belonging to a tribe has been perpetuated because it "has become an important marker of authenticity" and "national belonging" (ibid).

Social Stratification

Economic modernisation and urbanisation, hence, affected social hierarchies that were previously based in descent, tribal affiliations and ethnicity. The rigid and centuries old social stratification changed dramatically with the discovery and commercial production of oil. At one level, it resulted in the formation new class-based divisions based on economic wealth, professional expertise and educational accomplishments and on the other, it diluted and in some cases eradicated the erstwhile identities based on tribe and regions. Some scholars contend that class-based division is not new. Manfred Wenner (1975) categorises the pre-oil Saudi society into three classes based in their profession, social influence and political power. According to him, in the 1930s and the 1940s, the Saudi society was divided into the upper class comprising of the extended royal family,

ulema of al-Shaikh family and tribal leaders and land owning families in urban areas. The middle class comprised of those who served in government, owned businesses, merchant families and religious functionaries such as *Imams* of mosques, teachers at the *kuttab*[1] or *madrasa* etc. The lower classes were made up of manual labourers and workers, nomads, farmers and agricultural workers. Likewise, Sarah Yizraeli (2012) argues that even before the discovery of oil the society was divided into various classes "based on both societal and economic factors, although the collective consciousness placed more emphasis on, and accorded greater prestige to kinship and pedigree than occupation or employment" (Yizraeli, 2012: 267). Mamoun Fandy (2009) articulates that the class-based division in the Kingdom cannot be termed as 'new' because it existed already and the economic growth and social developments merely perpetuated the existing divisions by strengthening traditionally privileged sections.

On the other hand, scholars such as Mordechai Abir (1993) and Daryl Champion (2003) argue that social stratification as understood in terms of class-based divisions in modern societies was absent in the Saudi case before the advent of oil and economic growth. Notably, even if one agrees to existence of class-based divisions, the characteristic of the social stratification was vastly different and changed in the wake of the oil-propelled economic modernisation. Groups that were traditionally engaged in agriculture, farming and other manual works such as artisans, improved their economic and social status by acquiring education and engaging in businesses. Groups of small merchants and new professionals such as "managers, administrators, technicians, clerks, teachers of modern subjects, such as mathematics and science, lawyers, scientists, army officers" and those in government services comprised the newly educated middle classes (Rugh, 1973: 7). They acquired prestige and socio-economic power due to government largesse made possible by the rentier economy (Rugh, 1973; Heller and Safran, 1985; Al-Naqeeb, 1990; Yizraeli, 2012).

[1] Informal centres of imparting education run by individual scholars with small group of students were known as *Kuttab*. Scholars suggest that for centuries these informal centres were the most common form of imparting education prevalent in the Arab world, where students were taught to recite the Quran and sometimes learned basic writing and arithmetical skills (Husén and Postlethwaite, 1985).

Oil induced economic growth also changed the status of traditional elites and upper classes (Makki, 2011). In the beginning the ruling family, influential ulema, and prominent Hejazi mercantile families, together with tribal leaders, formed the upper classes. It changed significantly after the 1970s and while the ruling family with expanding numbers and growing economic investments consolidated its position, the only other section which could retain its social status was the Wahhabi ulema. Tribal leaders who earlier served as the intermediary between tribes and the ruling family, significantly lost their relevance, social influence and status due to economic changes, migration, urbanisation and changing nature of tribe. The oil wealth diminished the influence of the Hejazi mercantile families who previously formed the economic elite and they were replaced by newly emerging Najdi business families who had better access to the ruling family (Field, 1985; Chaudhry, 1997). Prominent Najdi families gained wealth and prestige with the help of their close association with the al-Saud and entered into local bureaucracy and consolidated their status as upper middle class (Fandy, 2009). Their economic fortunes improved; some started to own land and businesses, while others entered higher administration and became technocrats, educationists, and local functionaries.

A process of change in social stratification happened; newer groups of merchants and administrative officials gained clout while many groups that formed the erstwhile economic and political elite lost wealth, positions and influence to a new group of "upper middle classes" (Yizraeli, 2012: 274). Economic growth and spread of education further changed the nature of social stratification leading to a surge in the middle class population (Al-Khateeb, 2007) and to the emergence of divisions within this group. The class stratification was also fluid; some group benefitted from the modernisation and economic developments, others lost out due to lack of adequate skills needed to meet the new demands. Those left out of the urbanisation drive became increasingly dependent upon the state and its largesse for their survival. Erstwhile middle classes of merchants improved their position by accumulating wealth and investment in smaller businesses leading to improved quality of life (Quamar, 2014-15).

Another important factor was the growing prospects for social mobility, a significant aspect for the emergence of class divisions in Saudi Arabia (Al-Rabdi, 2005; Al-

Kharidli, 2008). The emergence of class-based social stratification was a result of oil generated economic modernisation that diminished previous social hierarchies engrained in descent and tribal affiliations resulting into widening the scope for social mobility through education and public-sector employment. As educational and professional opportunities became widely available they in turn became ladders for lower classes to gain wealth and improve their social status. The changes in traditional social hierarchies impacted questions of identity because even the traditionally marginalised sections such as Shias and women benefitted from the limited opportunities for social mobility (Fandy, 1996; Al-Khateeb, 2007).

The changes in the tribal nature of the population weakened the identities based on descent and resulted in the emergence of newer identities based on profession and new-found wealth and led to emergence of a new middle classes (Rugh, 1973; Heller and Safran, 1985).

Identity

In contemporary Saudi Arabia, there are many layers of kin-based, regional, ethnic and sectarian identities that form social cleavages and are important in economic and political realms. Even though all these identities have become part of the 'Saudi national identity' (Weston, 1987), ethnic, tribal and sectarian identities have not become obsolete. They continue to remain important at least in the formation of social consciousness and interactions. There are four aspects of contemporary realities that demand some reference because they have strong socio-economic and political implications. Tribal identity that signifies belongingness and purity of descent; regional identities such as Najdi, Hejazi, Asiri etc.; sectarian identity, which is specifically stronger among Shias concentrated mainly in the Eastern Province; and expatriate vis-à-vis local identify that reflects ethnic consciousness (Fuller and Szayna, 2000).

Consciousness about tribal identity is stronger, particularly because of its political and economic implications and dignity associated with pure Arab descent. In the words of Nadav Samin, "At the heart of the kingdom's modern genealogical culture is the compulsion many Saudis feel to assert a tribal descent, that is, to prove their lineal attachment to a historically recognizable Arabian tribe, and so establish their ancient

roots in the Arabian Peninsula" (Samin, 2015: 3-4). Thus, this tribal affiliation, despite becoming weaker when it comes to social, political and economic functions, remains an important marker of identity. It establishes social status but is conditioned on one's ability to acquire education and accumulate wealth, and is susceptible to questions about purity of descent. Even in the past, the idea of tribe as a fixed social entity was questionable and scholars suggest that it is more a social construct based on political and social circumstances than only based in descent (Al-Rasheed, 1991). Nevertheless, belongingness and descent from an original Arabian tribe remain significant in Saudi social consciousness despite losing on its socioeconomic and political functions. This is evident from popularity of genealogical studies, its coverage in the local press and the way this largely oral-based tradition acquired written historical tradition (Samin, 2015).

Parallel to tribal identity, a strong sense of regional identity prevails. The fluidity in social structures due to urbanisation and migration weakened these identities not in terms of individual's sense of belonging but as a basis for their socio-economic significance. While people continue to be identified based on their places of origin such as Hejazi, Asiri, Najdi or Qassimi, it became more a source of identity than a basis for social organisation (Hamza, 2002). The geographical integration of the society meant the formation of a supra-national 'Saudi national identity', thereby diluting the erstwhile region-based identities (Nevo, 1998; Okruhlik, 2004; Beranek, 2009). The idea of a distinct Saudi as against regional identities grew stronger due to state's effort to strengthen its legitimacy by integrating the society, viewed by critics as a homogenisation project of the al-Saud. Scholars argue that the Najdi-Wahhabi identity has been imposed upon the people of other regions to create artificial Saudi 'national identity' (Yamani, 2000; Al-Rasheed, 2002; and Al-Rasheed, 2004).

This struggle between 'local' and 'national' identities goes back to the evolution of the Kingdom and had followed the socio-political trajectory of the al-Saud who hailed from the Najd region. The familial identity of the al-Saud has become the 'national' identity for the entire population, first as the nomenclature of the state and later on as its 'supra-national' identity. The Saudi identity gained prominence over other regional identities including the religiously important Hejazi identity because of the power equation that emerged with the formation of the Kingdom. The al-Saud, with the help of Wahhabi

ulema, succeeded in creating a religion-induced counter narrative arguing that new rulers have come to purify the Holy lands from the 'un-Islamic' practices of the past (Commins, 2006). It gained support from numerous quarters of Muslims from different parts inside and outside the Kingdom and helped in strengthening the Saudi identity.

The 'Saudi-Najdi' identity became more pronounced in the wake of the post-oil boom economic developments as Najdi tribes, the primary constituency of al-Saud, were also the principal beneficiaries. A vast portion of early economic and infrastructural investments were aimed at this core constituency. It led to the emergence of them as the most important and powerful group in political and economic lives. Their economic fortune soared with oil wealth and political influence increased with al-Saud's power and authority. Thus, the social identities of this group became more pronounced over other identities, thereby creating some rifts. The process of economic development and globalisation further subdued localised identities leading to integration and strengthening of the supra-national Saudi identity (Nevo, 1998).

The formation of a Saudi 'national' identity is also attributed to decline in other sources of identity and changing patterns of social organisation. Ondrej Beranek argues:

> The formation of national identity in Saudi Arabia has three aspects. The first is based on the consolidation of the core of the nation around the ruling family, mainly through a network of relations based on tribal and regional origins. The second is the development of an institutional framework based on an expansion of the state's bureaucratic apparatus, which was facilitated by oil wealth. And the third aspect of this process lies in the creation of a national political culture, which to a large degree is based on the heritage of Najd... (Beranek, 2009: 5).

The diminishing regional characters and the increased geographical integration led to the weakening of regional identity. Though regional roots and specificities continue to be important sources of identity and cultural practices, its role in the social system has become obsolete and regional identities no longer dictate all aspect of people's life such as choice of occupation, residential area and marriage as was the case in the past (Quamar, 2014-15).

There, however, is one exception. While tribal and regional identities were profoundly diluted by forces of modernisation, sectarian divisions remained intact. Sunni and Shia divisions are not only independent of tribal affiliations and regional origins but remained immune to the efforts of modernisation and economic growth. Changing

social structures and loosing of family ties have not diluted sectarian divide and efforts at ‘integration’, particularly in the Eastern Province and Qatif, have not succeeded due to prevalent hostility and even contempt among the local Sunni authorities and Wahhabi ulema towards the Shias (Al-Rasheed, 1998; International Crisis Group, 2005; Jones, 2006). Shias are opposed to any attempts at ‘integration’ due to fears of losing their distinct sectarian identity or to cultural assimilation with the larger Wahhabi-Sunni Islam, which ideologically despises them. Scholars argue that Saudi Shias see the state’s efforts at ‘integration’ as a tool towards undermining the distinct Shia identity and their religious practices and thus, as recipe for forced assimilation (Fandy, 1996; Jones, 2006).

Saudi Shias have long complained of discrimination at the hands of the state as well as the majority Sunni population. The problem has two dimensions; one is that the Wahhabi ulema declared Shias as heretics, thus making them as lesser mortals (Sirriyeh, 1989). In one such instance in 1925, after Hejaz with pockets of Shia population and parts of Hasa with a concentrated Shia population came under al-Saud’s control, the Wahhabi ulema issued a *fatwa* asking the Shias to revert to the “religion of God and His Prophet” and stop their religious ceremonies and demanded destruction of their places of worship (Al-Yassini, 1985: 49-50). Similarly, Abdulaziz bin Baz, Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia (1993-1999), in one of his *fatwas,* condemned the Shias as following a distorted version of Islam (Bin Baz, n.d.). Such condemnations are is a regular feature in official Saudi-Wahhabi narrative (al-Rasheed, 1998; Jones, 2007). Secondly, the deep-seated suspicion of the state about Shia loyalty due to Saudi rivalry with Iran evokes political marginalisation and economic discrimination (Jones, 2006). Thus, Shias are not allowed to practice religious rituals and publish religious literature and Shia-dominated areas have remained marginalised in terms of infrastructure and educational and health facilities and do not have much representation either in state bureaucracy or local administration (Jones, 2007; International Crisis Group, 2009; Human Rights Watch, 2009).

While many have warned that the continued apathy of the authorities towards Shia sentiments can lead to major crisis, others argue that Shias have abandoned the path of confrontation and have adopted creative opposition to bring focus on their plight within

the system (Fandy, 1996; Al-Rasheed, 1998; Matthiesen, 2009; and Matthiesen, 2010). Concerns over isolation, discrimination and resentment that manifested in riots and violence in Eastern province and Qatif regions in the aftermath of the Iranian revolution and Kaaba Siege in 1979 forced some degree of change in al-Saud's attitude towards Shia citizens (Al-Rasheed, 1998; Jones, 2006). The monarchy recognised the need to integrate the Shias with the national mainstream and many steps were taken towards achieving this objective, especially towards improving educational facilities and economic opportunities in Shia dominated areas. The acceptance of Shia petition in 2003, allowing Shias to commemorate Ashura since 2008 and nomination of Shia members in the *Majlis al-Shura* in 2009 are a few examples of measures taken to bring a sense of belongingness among Shias (Yamani, 2008). Despite these measures, the socio-political conditions of Shias continue to remain ridden in poverty and discrimination. The problems took violent turns again during the Arab Spring in 2010-11 and were dealt with as a security threat (Matthiesen, 2012; Wehrey, 2013).

Ethnic cleavages are starker vis-à-vis expatriate population, especially those from poor Asian nations employed as low wage workers such as construction labourers, household employees and lower division office staffs. Social intermixing of expatriate population with the natives is rare (Human Rights Watch, 2004; Quamar, 2014-15). In most of the cases, expatriates from various regions and ethnicities live in separate residential areas and social interaction with the local population is limited to occasional occupational interactions. People from South and Southeast Asia, a large majority of who are employed in unskilled jobs, often find themselves to be target of abuse, which in a number of cases acquire ethnic and racial manifestations or may originate from the idea of Saudi superiority (Ahmed, 2008). This idea of superiority emanates from various notions such as purity of faith, economic privilege and ethnic superiority. On the other hand, Arab expatriates do intermingle due to the idea of Arab fraternity and because of strong linguistic identity but it remains limited as marriages and social intermixing is rare. Western expatriates living in Saudi Arabia are not usually discriminated on the basis of their ethnic identity but instances of their intermixing and social interaction with local population too are far and few. They are mostly found to be living in gated-

compounds without much scope for any interaction except for work-related issues (Glasze, 2006).

Systematic discrimination against expatriate labour force has been perpetuated due to sponsorship system (*kafala*) of employment whereby the employer holds the right on many aspect of the worker's life. There have been instances of workers being abused, tortured and sexually exploited by the Saudi employer. Workers who try to leave or change their job can be prosecuted if the employer declares them to have 'escaped' (*hurub*). The rules and regulations are biased in favour of employers and on many occasions the judiciary has been discriminatory towards expatriate workers (Human Rights Watch, 2004). The number of expats under detention, or in jail for petty crimes, as well as on death-row is reportedly high while the number of suicide by expats too has witnessed an increasing trend (Amnesty International, 2013). Qanta Ahmed (2008), an Asian-American medical practitioner who spent a few years in Saudi Arabia, relates that she found some Saudi women look down upon her with contempt because of her Asian origin, although they became more friendly when they came to know that she was a medical practitioner and is a Muslim.

Changing Nature of Family and Kinship Behaviour

The nature and functions of family are changing due to a number of factors such as economic growth, urbanisation and globalisation and sociologists argue that it is a worldwide phenomenon (Goode, 1963; Giddens, 2006). Though universal, the changes are not homogenous and societies react differently to these forces of social change, thus, retaining their specificities.

In the Saudi case, changes in family life were slow in the early decades but gained momentum since the 1970s due to the oil-led economic developments. The pace of change further increased since the 1990s because of factors such as modern education, increased use of technology, penetration of mass media and satellite television, widespread use of internet and social media, exposure to the outside world and impacts of globalisation (Mazrui, 1999; Tarabichi, 2006; Nurullah, 2008). There are three dimensions to impacts that demand detailed discussion; family composition, nature of interactions in the family and its functions.

Firstly, the composition of family has changed and two important trends can be noticed; the rise is number of nuclear families and reduction in the size of Saudi family. The most significant change is the increase in the number of nuclear families. It is important to note that the term nuclear family should not be understood in a global context as the nature and characteristics of nuclear families can be different in different societies. Nuclear family means a husband and wife living with their unmarried children. In Saudi context, there can be variations, particularly when the man is in a polygamous marriage. In such cases, it can be a house with more than one wife or there would be more than one family with the man providing economic sustenance to all of them (Al-Khateeb, 2007). There are other variations; for example, a common idea associated with nuclear families is that both, men and women, work outside home and contribute to family income. This is a novelty in Saudi Arabia as the idea of women's participation in the economy and work outside the household has not gained a widespread acceptance (Doumato, 1999). The number of Saudi women who work outside home or are bread winners is small and only 20 per cent of the labour force constitute of Saudi women (World Bank, 2015) meaning about four-fifth are dependent on income of male members of the family, thereby underscoring the patriarchal characteristic.

Though statistics on family structure in the Kingdom are not available, studies suggest that the phenomenon of nuclear household is widespread among all sections (Al-Khateeb, 2007; Al-Gharib, 2012). In the past, people lived in bigger households and family comprised of three generations of grandparents, unmarried sons and daughters and married sons with wife and children. With increasing urbanisation and rising economic prosperity it became easier to afford separate houses, thus, extended family household began to disappear and nuclear families became predominant (El-Haddad, 2003; Achoui, 2006). It is suggested that the spread of Wahhabi ideology that discourages intermingling of male and female members of the same household if they are not *mahram*[2] such as cousins, brother's wife or sister's husband too contributed to the phenomenon of nuclear households (Al-Fadeil, 2014).

[2] Those family members with whom a person has direct blood relations (father, mother, brother, sister etc) and with whom marriage in not possible as per Islamic laws (that is maternal/paternal uncle/aunt or grandparents) or who are married with each other (husband and wife) are regarded as *mahram*.

The other important trend in family composition is in its declining size. Traditionally, Saudis had a preference for large families. This preference was a result of multiple factors including extended household, multiple marriages and honour and prestige associated with more number of children. It concurred with Wahhabi-Islamic idea rejecting any need for family planning or birth control measures to limit family size, which contributed to prevalence of large families in the past (Farrag et al., 1983). It is gradually declining mainly due to rising cost of living, decline in polygamy, education and social awareness (Achoui, 2006; Al-Gharib, 2012). Another important contributing factor to increased number of smaller families is declining fertility rate among Saudi women (Khoja and Farid, 2000; Khraif, 2001; AlSheeha, 2010). Though the trend of smaller and nuclear families is prevalent in all areas, there is a degree of urban-rural divide. Scholars suggest that the phenomenon is more visible in urban areas and among educated sections and preference for larger families has not disappeared in the remote areas, small towns and rural households (Khraif, 2001). Nevertheless, as people started to live in different areas due to work and economic reasons, individual households became smaller and family constituted only the immediate kin, while relatives living either in far away areas or in the same neighbourhood became 'distant' (Al-Khateeb, 2007).

Secondly, the nature of interactions within the families has changed and three important trends underline this phenomenon; frequency of family meetings has declined and its nature changed; man-woman relationship has changed; and sex-segregation within families has declined. Family meetings and congregations around festivities, celebrations and mourning were a major part of social life which brought people closer and kept them in touch with the extended family and even neighbourhood. This has changed with extended family meetings becoming less frequent as people started to live in different neighbourhoods and cities due to economic compulsions. Similarly, when people travel to bigger cities or abroad for education or employment, they lose touch with the larger family affecting interactions. Even within the nuclear household, the nature of interaction has changed. In cities, family meetings are less frequent and many families get time together only during weekends, which has led to less communication

among members of the immediate family. Therefore, the idea of family meetings over supper, during celebrations or mourning has become weaker.

In addition, the nature of family meetings and interactions has changed. With changing social structure and urbanisation, urbanized men and women preferred to hangout in shopping malls and *qahwas* (cafe) while religious congregations have been reduced to only family ceremonies such as marriages, births or deaths and even the duration of these ceremonies have become shorter (Al-Fadeil, 2014). This has qualitatively changed the modes of interaction between individuals and families. While family remains the primary mode of social organisation, the changing nature of the society has led to increase in the numbers of public forums such as women, youth and sports clubs, which were nearly non-existent in the past. This led to a situation whereby family being the forum for such as meetings and interactions is replaced by professional associations and guilds. The phenomenon can be witnessed among both men and women; men interact in workplaces and among peers in professional organisations and sports clubs. Women, on the other hand, even if they do not pursue a professional life maintain social clubs and neighbourhood female associations that are replacing the erstwhile role played by extended family. Mass and social media too have affected the nature of interactions as people tend to engage with 'outsiders', even when living in the same households (Al-Fadeil, 2014). Though, the bonds within families remain strong, the frequency of family meetings, especially with the extended family, has become lesser (El-Haddad, 2003; Achoui, 2006).

While the frequency of family meetings and congregations has declined, man-woman interactions and meetings in nuclear households have increased. For example, the interaction between male and female members of a family became much more frequent in nuclear families as the families tend to spend more time with each other (Al-Khateeb, 2007). In contrast, the idea of sex-segregation is followed even in private lives in extended households, and most of the households have different quarters for men and women. This has qualitatively changed the relationship among men and women in the family. In the traditional set up, meetings between husbands and wives, fathers and daughters and brothers and sisters were less frequent and there remained a degree of unfamiliarity among men and women within the same household even among *mahrams*.

Similarly, the man-woman relationship was defined by authority for men. In modern Saudi households, this has changed to a large extent, especially between husbands and wives there remains more openness and a relationship of interdependence, even though nominal authority remains with the man.

Lesser sexual segregation within the family is another important aspect of change in nature of family interactions. While the values associated with gender segregation remains, the norms particularly within private lives are changing as wives, daughters and sisters tend to spend more time with their husbands, fathers and brothers than with other women of the extended family. Sex segregation is strictly followed in public life, and even within the privacy of house, strangers of opposite sexes are not supposed to intermix. Most of the modern households have different guestrooms for male and female visitors. Elvira Arasli, wife of a diplomat from Azerbaijan, who spent three years in Saudi Arabia during the mid-1990s observes, "Guests who are not very close to the owners of the house are usually received by both husband and wife....She would escort the women guests to the place allocated especially for women", while the men would go to the male guestroom (Arasli, 2008: 176). However, the strict segregation in private lives whereby men and women from the same household used to live in isolation is not common in urban areas. Sometimes, such segregated spaces are absent even in public; for example, in restaurants, hotels, shopping complexes and malls, families can be seen spending time together and indulging in leisure activities, which was a rarity and even a taboo (Quamar, 2014-15).

Thirdly, functions of Saudi family have undergone several changes and it is possible to identify five broad areas where this can be noticed; role in raising children; gender-defined roles; socialisation; providing identity; and its diminishing role in marriages. The role of family in raising children, especially in their education has changed. Before the spread of modern education, schools and colleges were a rarity, thus it was the family that imparted education. While the role of local mosques and *kuttab* was important, it was primarily the responsibility of the women in the family to take care of children's education in the early stages, and then they were assigned to the father or local religious teacher (Husén and Postlethwaite, 1985). The role has now been shifted to schools, colleges and universities, thus the outside environment and not the family

has more impact on children's education and their socialisation. Many have complained that rising individuality and social degeneration among the youth are due to declining role and involvement of the family in socialisation and education of children, particularly in urban areas (Al-Khateeb, 1993; Al-Kharidli, 2008). The situation is slightly different in rural families where women continue to engage in traditional tasks, even though, school education has become widespread in these areas as well (Al-Ghamdi, 1989; Al-Gharib, 2012).

Gender roles within the family have undergone changes. Traditionally, men were the bread winners and women were house keepers. The latter had added responsibilities of raising children and also supporting men in unorganised sectors such as farmlands, raring animals or fishing (Kour, 1991). With increased affluence came maids and household labourers from poorer Asian countries. Thus, affluent Saudi urban women are free from many of the tradition gender roles that they such as raising children, housekeeping and working on unorganised sectors. The transformation in the family life has changed the status of women in the family who seek education and employment and have become assertive about their choices as has been discussed in Chapter Six.

The function of family as the primary institution of socialisation, however, has not changed. Daily activities associated with family life remains intact and people prefer to lead a family life, eat together and share leisure moments with their families. Saudis identify themselves with family name, remain loyal to family members and are sensitive to family honour. It remains the most important and primary unit of social life and its basic functions have not changed. Nevertheless, urbanisation, modernisation and globalisation have affected the role of family in individual's lives and choices and has constrained its functions of families. Frequent travels within the country or abroad for education, employment and businesses have increased physical distances within families. It also exposed Saudi households to different cultures and lifestyles. Advent of internet and social media has brought a sense of fluidity in the family and social life (Al-Askar, 2014). In the words of one Saudi journalist, people became more connected to the outside but within the household social media has created distances (Al-Fadeil, 2014). The way people organise their lives have become less interconnected and modes

of interactions and frequency of meetings have become lesser leading to the new generation identifying more with the global than local developments and trends.

A number of Saudi scholars have highlighted the change in family behaviour whereby individual's choice in decisions is getting precedence over family's preferences (Al-Kharidli, 2008; Al-Gharib, 2012). In several matters of significance for individuals, family choice, traditionally, had predominance but with changing lifestyles one could notice the assertion of individual's choice. Family as an institution has not become irrelevant but its functions in socialisation became weaker and people are able to make their own choices and take decisions. In other words, the importance of family has remained intact but some degree of individuality is becoming acceptable. In realms such as education, profession and marriage, individual choices are respected more than ever before, hence limiting the role of the family. Studies suggest that more students are taking decision regarding what course to study, and an increasing number of youth prefer to have a say in choosing their professions and spouses (Jiffry, 2013).

As discussed in the previous section, the function of family in providing individual identity remains intact. Individuals are identified with three names; given name, father's name and family name and they signify the social prestige and respect which are associated with family and tribe. People inevitably recognise themselves with their family and it gains importance in determining their socio-political and economic fortunes. The family name also gains significance in solemnising marriages as those belonging to 'prestigious' families are preferred over those who have less pedigree. Family as an institution has undergone changes both in its outlook as well as in its normative role, thus, impacting many other social institutions. This is most importantly reflected in marriages, which is regarded an important social institution that primarily fulfils the functions of economic union, human emotional needs and procreation and is primarily the responsibility of family. This has undergone change to a large extent as discussed in the section on marriage.

In addition to these changes, there are three aspects of family life that are important to understand. Firstly, despite changes, family life remains significant and it remains the primary social institution. Families continue to have stronger bonds and people from an

extended family, despite living in nuclear households, prefer to reside in close quarters and this facilitates frequent interactions among the members of the extended family (El-Haddad, 2003; Achoui, 2006). Individuals place family at the top of their priorities when taking major decisions. It is argued that the continuing adherence to tradition in family life could be "because the accumulated traditions and customs did not have enough time to vanish from popular memory" as the change in the socio-economic conditions are comparatively recent (Arasli, 2008: 176).

Despite the continuous changes in the nature and character of the Saudi family, the society continues to attach paramount importance to family and emphasise on the benefits of leading a family life. Strangers are inevitably asked about their family status, and married men and women are respected more than people who are at the age of marriage but choose to remain single (Craig, 2007; Arasli, 2008; Quamar, 2014-15). James Craig, former British diplomat who had served in Saudi Arabia, relates what a Saudi Prince once told him regarding family life: "The family comes first, before country or town or tribe or professional colleagues" (Craig, 2007: 9). He further observes, that in Saudi Arabia "where there has been more economic and technical change in the last 50 years ...., social change has been much slower and much less disruptive. The family is rock" (ibid). The role of family in fostering ties among people of various clans and tribes and in the nation building process has remained important. Thus, the government encourages people to acquire education and enter into family life through monetary help and subsidies (Al-Kharidli, 2008).

Secondly, the changes in family life are not universal and depend upon several factors including education but most importantly urbanisation. There is a stark rural-urban divide when it comes to lifestyle and is reflected in family life. Whereas the role and significance of family has undergone major changes in urban areas, the rural families retain a greater degree of traditionalism. Rural families have not remained untouched from new developments but they have had only a limited impact. The factors are many but of particular importance are lack of exposure to the outside world, less number of foreign visitors and lesser penetration of modern amenities, factories and offices. People remain largely engaged in traditional economic activities like farming and cultivation and local trading activities (Al-Ghamdi, 1989; Al-Rabdi, 2005). The idea that foreign

culture and Western influence leads to degeneration is prevalent in rural areas and small towns as people prefer traditional lifestyles and look down upon anything foreign (Naumkin, 1994).

Thirdly, the changes in family life and its continuing significance has created dichotomies in the society as people manoeuvre between tradition and modernisation and in many circumstances norms that were acceptable previously have become unacceptable and vice versa. For example, women's education and work outside the household was taboo but is becoming increasingly acceptable. Though female participation in the economy remains miniscule, the number of educated women and female rate of employment and employment seekers has increased. This has created dichotomy between the 'traditional' subdued woman and modern educated female professionals. This dichotomy between 'modern' and 'traditional' roles of family has generated debates signifying the extent of the change and its impacts.

The tension between impacts of 'tradition' and 'modernity' on family life is visible in the local debates. Some Saudi scholars lament the detrimental effect of 'westernisation' (*taghrib*) and globalisation (*uulma*) on the local culture and family (Al-Badah, 2010; Al-Abbad, 2013) but many have argued in favour of reforms while preserving the local heritage (Al-Ghamdi, 1989; Al-Khateeb, 2007; Al-Kharidli, 2008). Apart from the government, religious preachers emphasise on the need to preserve the institution of family and its centrality in the society within the context that Islam prefers and promotes family life (Al-Gharib, 2012). It is argued that the diffusion of family is against the ethos of Islam and Saudi cultural values and the changes in family structure and functions are part of 'Western' influence which causes "moral degeneration" and "wasteful behaviour" (Al-Harbi, 2003; Al-Badah, 2010). While there are many religious scholars who reject any scope for change in the function of family as 'Westernisation', some tend to have a different understanding. They argue that the changes are inevitable impacts of modernisation essential for economic welfare but emphasise on the need to preserve local culture and values (Alosaimi, 2014; Almosaed, 2008).

Marriage

Despite the universal nature of marriage as a social institution, the variation in its nature and characteristics is incredibly enormous (Westermarck, 1891; Malinowski, 1913; Giddens, 2006). Industrialisation, urbanisation and modernisation have deeply impacted the institution of marriage in all societies, though it continues to be largely regarded as the only social institution to establish family and for procreation. In many societies, due to increasing individual freedom and changing definition and nature of gender and sexuality, institutions such as live-in relationship, same-sex relationship etc. are being accepted both socially and legally as legitimate forms of marriage. Globalisation and increased interconnectedness have made such 'modern' and 'post-modern' forms of union between and among genders as a widespread universal phenomena. Feminist discourses and movements for women's rights and empowerment have made wide-ranging and long-lasting impacts on institution of marriage in different degrees in different cultures, societies and communities (Hunter, 1991).

Though some of these changes are evident in Muslim societies, particularly among the youth, these societies have largely continued to recognise marriage as the only legitimate form of procreation and union between man and woman (Abduh, 2010). The idea is strengthened through Islamic teachings and traditions, and finds strong advocacy among religious scholars and followers of the faith. Wahhabi Islam, which is predominantly followed in Saudi Arabia, regards Islamic form of marriage as the only legitimate way for establishment of a family and procreation and any other form of relationship including live-in or homosexuality are regarded as *fitna* or evil (Haj, 2009; Friend, 2012).

Though marriage as an institution in Islam or in Saudi legal system has not witnessed changes, its nature and trend has witnessed a number of changes. As time and circumstances changed, political, economic and social realities too underwent changes and with influx of oil wealth, modern education and scientific and technological advancements, the institution of marriage too witnessed transformations. The function of marriage and its contractual nature remains the same but marital behaviour, trends and nature have undergone changes (Al-Khateeb, 2007). Seven broad trends, namely, decline in endogamous marriages, late marriages for both men and women, rise in price

of *mahr* (bride price), lower rate of polygamous and child marriages, increase in inter-tribal and marriages with non-Saudis, lesser number of arranged marriages and higher rate of divorce can be noticed.

Firstly, there is a decline in endogamous marriages. Saudi tradition and culture accord high worth to purity of descent and respect and status are based on lineage (Lipsky, 1959; Kour, 1991), thus, affecting the nature of marriage. Local culture and value system play significant role in determining the nature and characteristic of marriages as well as marital behaviour. Marriage is regarded as an important institution that helps in continuation of family, clan and tribe. Thus, endogamous marriages within the family, clan or tribe were the norm and first-cousin marriage was predominant (Al-Khateeb, 2007). There were, however, some notable exceptions. In early years of formation of the Kingdom inter-tribal marriages were used by the al-Saud members as an instrument for formation of alliances and as a means to extend influence. A number of scholars have highlighted Ibn Saud's penchant for inter-tribal or exogamous marriages as a means for gaining more allies and stability of his rule (Jones, 2010; Al-Rasheed, 2010; Wynbrandt, 2010). This, however, was not a prevalent practice and was confined to ambitious tribal leaders and individuals with power and authority.

Endogamous marriages are preferred because of the prestige associated with tribe, clan and family and also because the amount of *mahr* exchanged in intra-family marriages are lesser. Most of the marriages are solemnised within the family because it was regarded important to preserve the purity of the tribe. Historian Z. H. Kour observes, "A man was expected to marry in the first place a *bint amm* (daughter of a paternal uncle), in the second a *bint khal* (daughter of a maternal uncle), and in the third any other cousin" (Kour, 1991: 190). Over a period of time, however, an overall decline in endogamous marriages and increase in exogamous marriages has been noticed and since the late 1990s, the phenomenon has become frequent.

There are a number of factors that have contributed to decline in endogamous marriages. Mainly it is attributed to increasing spread of higher education among women. Statistics from Saudi government sources reveals that only 36 per cent of women with university education preferred to enter into an endogamous marriage, while

as much as 50 per cent of women with elementary education chose to marry within the family, the proportion increased to 58 per cent when it comes to women who did not have any formal education. Similar trends can be witnessed among men as well (MoEP, 2005). There are other factors responsible for the drop such as increased internal migration, declining trend of extended family, gradual weakening of kinship ties and increasing trend towards private ownership of properties and awareness of health complications caused by endogamy (Al-Khateeb, 2007).

Financial reasons played an important role in prevalence of endogamous marriages. In tribal lifestyle, it was the clan or tribe that co-owned pastoral lands and wells and a marriage into another clan or tribe would have led to sharing the property as Islamic inheritance laws allow for transfer of properties to women. This prevented people to marry outside the family and led to preference of marriages within the family, clan or tribe. However, as more people choose to live in urban areas and nuclear families became a widespread trend, private ownership of property became a common phenomenon. Thus, people no more felt the need or compulsion to marry a cousin to keep the family property intact.

Health issues too have contributed to the declining trend as the long practice of endogamous marriages has created many genetic complications among Saudis. Medical studies in Saudi Arabia reveal that children born into endogamous marriages are more susceptible to congenital and genetic disorders (El-Hazmi et al., 1995; Al-Abdulkareem and Ballal, 1998; Hamamy, 2012). Such cases have been found to be high in the Kingdom, which has led people to look for marriages outside their family and clan. Importantly, local health facilities have started counselling and consultation programmes with the help the government to make people aware of effects of such marriages (Albejaidi, 2010; *Gulf News*, 2015). Another important factor that had led to the decline is increasing freedom for women in choosing their spouses, particularly among urban, educated and career oriented women (Jiffry, 2013). They want to have more say in their marriage and are choosing to marry men who are educated and ready to accommodate and respect their rights (Al-Khateeb, 2007).

Secondly, the amount of bride price (*mahr*) has increased. As prescribed in Islam, marriage in Saudi Arabia is regarded as a civil contract between a man and a woman, mostly arranged by parents and solemnised in the presence of family and relatives. The groom is supposed to pay a bride price, which traditionally was paid in kind in the form of animal and jewellery or sometimes in monetary form and largely used to be a small symbolic amount (Lipsky, 1959). The trend has changed immensely with time and rising affluence. It has become a symbol for display of wealth and a tool to attract the 'best' suit for the groom. Rich parents offer large amount of *mahr* to marry their son to an 'ideal' bride. Due to these practices, the nature and function of *mahr* has changed and women have started to demand huge amount of money as *mahr*, which was unheard of in the past (Al-Khateeb, 2007). They see it as a monetary security if the husband chooses to divorce or seeks a second or third wife. Women choose to set an amount as *mahr* and can put other conditions depending upon their marital and social status and descent (ibid).

Women from middle classes can demand *mahr* from SR20,000 (approximately US$5,000) up to SR50,000 (US$13,000), while for upper class women it ranges from SR100,000 (US$26,000) to SR200,000 (US$52,000) (Baqader, 1993; Al-Khateeb, 2007). There are a number of reasons for this, most importantly the growing affluence. With rising financial fortunes, Saudis started to offer high bride price and it gradually became a matter of prestige. In addition, there are specific situations where the *mahr* is high; for example, if an older man wishes to take a second, third or a younger bride. On the other hand, women demand higher *mahr* with a belief that increasing cost of marriage would prevent men from polygamy. Studies conducted by Saudi Ministry of Social Affairs identified rising cost of *mahr* as a major social problem facing the youth as it cause them financial burden and is causing late marriages, celibacy or even spinsterhood (Al-Jahni, 2006). Largely, monetary help from friends and family are sought towards bearing rising cost of marriage. Further, to resolve the problem, the authorities have launched programmes to provide monetary loans to men for marriage to deal with rising instances for celibacy and spinsterhood among Saudi men and women (Al-Rumi and Al-Sayegh, 2004; Al-Kharidli, 2008). Steps to curb the demands for high *mahr* has also been taken; for example, in 2015 Mecca governor Khalid al-

Faisal issued an order fixing the *mahr* for an unmarried women at SR50,000 (Habtor, 2015) but many women expressed dissatisfaction at the order arguing that it compromises their rights.

Thirdly, late marriage for both men and women has become common and the rising cost of marriages is regarded as one of the major reasons. Traditionally, early marriage for both men and women was preferred and the average age of first marriage for girls was 13-14 years while boys were married at 16-17 (Al-Khateeb, 2007). Oil, economic growth and demographic changes have led to decline in preference for early marriage. Since the 1990s, the average age of marriage for both men and women is on the rise and average marital age for Saudi women has shifted to mid-twenties (Salam, 2013). As per 1992 census, a total of 6.6 per cent of people married before reaching the age of 20 years; while men constituted a mere 0.7 per cent, female ratio was 12.5 per cent (MoEP, 1992). The average age at first marriage for women in the 1980s was 18 years, this rose to 22 years towards the end of 1990s and by the mid-2000s reached a high of 25 years (Tabutin and Schoumaker, 2005).

The demographic data released by the Saudi Ministry of Economy and Planning reveals that during 2006-07, 32.1 per cent Saudi women above the age of 15 years had not entered into a marital alliance, 60.2 per cent were married and 7.8 per cent were either widowed or divorced (MoEP, 2007). The number of women between 15 and 19 years who were married was a small 4 per cent, a significant decline in comparison to 12.5 per cent in 1992 (MoEP, 1992). Similar trends can be seen among men and as of 2006-07 a large proportion of 40 per cent men above 15 years had not entered into marital relations even once (MoEP, 2007). With improving education levels and rising cost of living, people prefer to marry after getting financial stability, which in normal circumstances takes time leading to rise in average marital age. Among other factors contributing to the trend, steps taken by the monarchy to curb child marriage and better awareness of health hazards of early marriage are noteworthy as discussed later in the section (Al-Khateeb, 2007).

Fourthly, the number of arranged marriages has come down or the way marriages were arranged has undergone changes. Traditionally, girls did not have any say in marriages;

it was the prerogative of parents and family to make decisions on behalf of girls. Largely, proposals came from a man's side through his family. Though men had a larger say in their marriage, in practice, it was the parents and family that arranged marriages for both men and women. However, this trend has changed and individuals are increasingly having a say in choice of partners. Studies reveal that since the 1990s the number of arranged marriages for men and women witnessed an overall decline. For example, a survey in Riyadh and Jeddah conducted in 2013 by a local Arabic language newspaper revealed that 65 per cent of Saudi women met their spouses on social media, while only 35 per cent were married through traditional arranged marriages (Jiffry, 2013).

The way marriages are conceived and solemnised and conventional reasons for people to enter into conjugal ties are undergoing modifications, even though, the degree of this change is small. Largely, marriages were solemnised as per parental wishes and a mere consent of groom and bride was considered sufficient. With changing trends, the clergy has also emphasised on the need to avoid 'forced marriages'. In 2005, the Grand Mufti issued a *fatwa* prohibiting 'forced marriage' for women saying: "Forcing a woman to marry someone she does not want and preventing her from wedding that whom she chooses.....is not permissible" (*BBC News*, 2005). Increasingly people are choosing to marry beyond conventional reasons including for love, a growing trend among educated and urban youth (Al-Qaba, 2004). This is strange for a society where strict sex segregation is practiced, both in public and private. Sex segregation minimises any chances of intermixing and falling in love but social media and internet provide youths with opportunities to establish contacts, fall in love and marry. Discussions with youths reveal that love-marriages are more common than generally understood (Quamar, 2014-15). Once a boy and girl fall in love they keep in contact through social media and manage to meet in shopping malls and private houses despite strict religious indicts and social taboo. A number of youths interviewed for this research related stories of them or their friend, cousin or a distant relative falling in love and then marrying the girl of his choice. Moreover, there have been instances when a girl has refused to marry a person of her parents' choice and complained to local authorities and getting relief from courts (Al-Fawaz, 2014a).

Fifthly, marriages with non-Saudis have become frequent. Though statistics are not available, studies suggest that inter-tribal marriages and marriages between Saudis and non-Saudis are on the rise (Al-Rumi, 2004; Al-Khateeb, 2007). Predominantly such marriages take place with Arab and Muslim non-Saudis and largely, it is the men who marry non-Saudi women either when they go to foreign countries for business or education or sometimes a Saudi man marries an expat woman residing in the Kingdom. Instances of Saudi women choosing to marry a non-Saudi, Arab, non-Arab but a Muslim man are also on the rise. Due to the growing number of such marriages, in February 2014, the General Organization for Social Insurance confirmed that the dependents of a Saudi woman married to a non-Saudi man — both Arabs and non-Arabs including husband and children — are eligible to get social benefits akin to any other marriage (Thiab, 2014). It also indicates a social acceptability of the trend of exogamous marriages including to non-Saudis by Saudi women, particularly among the urban and educated families.

Sixthly, one sees a decline in the number of polygamous and child marriages. Though these social ills continue to be practiced, their prevalence has declined due to modernising effects of education and legal curbs put in place by the government. Instances of polygamous marriages rose exponentially in the immediate aftermath of production of oil as men with newly found wealth opted to marry more than one woman at a time. Polygamous marriages were not a common practice in the past, only a few who could afford to support more than one families, mostly rich traders or tribal leaders, used to indulge in multiple marriages. The practice had Islamic sanctions and social acceptability with the condition that the wives had to be treated equally. With the influx of oil wealth men with better means could easily afford and justify having more than one wife (Al-Khateeb, 2007; Yamani, 2008). Since the 1990s the practice has again witnessed a decline mainly because of economic compulsions and increasing education. For example, in 2005 nearly 16 per cent of urban Saudi men had two or more wives, while the figure in rural areas was 26 per cent (MoEP, 2005). Among women 28.3 per cent of illiterate women were found to be in polygamous marriages and comparatively a smaller 7.9 per cent of women with university degree entered into such marriages.

The practices of child marriage and marriage of young girls to older men remain a problem and are noticed more frequently in less developed areas in the south particularly in Jazan, Qasim and Najran Provinces (Al-Khateeb, 2014). Despite efforts to end the practice, the situation has not changed much and media reports suggests that Saudi Arabia records one of the highest number of child marriages in the WANA region (Al-Ahmed, 2011). In 2009, UNICEF issued a statement expressing disappointment over the continued prevalence of child marriage in the Kingdom (Veneman, 2009). Though it is not as prevalent in the cities and urban locations, the situation has not changed much in remote areas. It has also been reported that the monarchy is mulling over setting a minimum age of marriage for both genders at 18 years to curb the practice of child marriage (*Saudi Gazette*, 2013). This generated debate in the local media and was hailed by commentators as a step in right direction (Al-Khateeb, 2014) but the proposal was blocked by the Council of Senior Ulema and could not be implemented (Al-Ghamdi, 2014).

Finally, the rate of divorce has risen and Saudi scholars state that it is a major social problem (Abduh, 2010; Al-Omani, 2014). Due to contractual nature of marriage in Islam, in Saudi Arabia divorce does not has any stigma attached with it but is considered a social ill (Lipsky, 1959; Kour, 1991; Zuhur, 2011). Sharia allows men to divorce their wives and women to seek divorce (known as *khula*) but it is also discouraged, meaning it is allowed but is not considered a good practice (Al-Rumi, 2004). Thus, in practice, marriages are entered into with an understanding that it will last for the lifetime of the spouses but are not preserved in all circumstances. “In cases where the wife is barren or is unable to produce a male heir, where the husband fails to maintain a suitable living standard for his wife, or where the temperament and habits of the spouses are seriously incompatible”, people usually dissolved their marriages (Lipsky, 1959: 56).

Though there are no studies or data to see the prevalence of divorce in pre-oil era, scholars suggest that it was rare in urban areas and common among Bedouins and rural areas (Al-Khateeb, 2007). Studies suggest that the rate of divorce has increased in the past two decades as in other GCC countries (AlMunajjed, 2010). Media reports and official statistics suggest that the divorce rate is rising; for example, in 2010 more than

18,000 divorces were reported, it rose to nearly 25,000 in 2011 and nearly 30,000 divorce cases were reported during 2012 (Alshayea, 2012; *Al-Eqtisadiah*, 2013). The number of divorces has increased further over the years and in the first six months of 2015 as much as 33,000 divorces were recorded (Alshayea, 2015).

Experts suggest that factors such as incompatibility among spouses, rising level of education among women, changing lifestyles, frequent marital discords and increasing expectations in marriages have contributed to the rising rate of divorces (Baqader, 1993; AlMunajjed, 2010a). The number of women seeking divorce has also increased, and it is suggested that since the partners are not allowed to meet before marriage and educated women find it difficult to live with traditional men and hence, many marriages end up in divorces (Al-Rumi, 2004; Abduh, 2010). According to reports, 2014 saw a 47 per cent rise in number of women seeking divorce or initiating divorce procedures through courts (Al-Sughair, 2014). According to journalist Samar Fatany "Social norms and government restrictions continue to create a lot of unhappy wives and are responsible for the increasing number of divorces and broken homes" (Fatany, 2013b).

Kinship Behaviour

Kinship ties (*asabiya*) are recognised as the primary mode of organisation in human societies encompassing economic, political, legal, moral and religious domains of life, particularly in primordial and traditional societies (King-Irani, 2004). In the case of WANA region this becomes more important because of continuing influence of kinship ties in the political, economic, social realms and even though, newer forms and modes of organisation, such as political Islam and 'youth hip hop culture' are emerging as a response to globalisation and other factors, kinship ties remain a powerful galvanising system (Shryock, 1997; Wedeen, 1999; Joseph, 2000; McMurray, 2002; King-Irani, 2004). In Saudi Arabia, kinship ties remain an important rallying point for determining political actions, economic behaviour and in shaping perceptions despite numerous structural changes and their impacts.

For centuries, kinship ties formed the basis of economic life for both the nomadic people and those who lived a sedentary life. Among Bedouins (*badu*) territories, including pastoral land, were co-owned by kin-groups that were used for breeding

camel and goats (Kour, 1991). The settled population organised their economic life around family owed trade and businesses. Similarly, skill based professions such as of artisans and carpenters were passed on from one generation to another within the family, making these professions hereditary. Even chieftaincy of tribe passed within the dominant family. The situation started to change soon after the emergence of the oil-industry and gained momentum towards the end of the 20th century.

By most accounts, there are hardly any nomadic population left in Saudi Arabia, except for those who chose to live a semi-nomadic life, meaning some segment of population maintain desert camps and take time off from urban life to spend time in the desert (Salameh, 1981; Kay, 1982; Tibi, 1990b). There are two important factors for this transformation; a natural outcome of social change due to economic modernisation and al-Saud's 'detribalization' policy of encouraging settled lifestyle through incentives to bring political stability and security (Al-Khateeb, 1981; Fabietti, 1982). This affected the traditional *badu* (Bedouin) lifestyle in which territories, wells and pastoral lands were owned by tribes and not by individuals. Settled urban lifestyle destroyed kin-based *badu* economy that was a characteristic feature of the desert life (Cole, 2003). Those who lived in tribal or community villages were also affected as the village economies that were based on farming had to reconcile with the advent of technology and new methods of mass cultivation and changed the kin-based *al-Hayat al-Badawi* (Bedouin life) and *al-Hayat al-Rifi* (village life) forever and kin-based modes of socioeconomic organisation shifted to skill-based professions (Rugh, 1973; Kay, 1982).

Despite these changes, kinship ties remained strong in terms of giving preferential treatment in allocation of resources, jobs, positions in the government and establishment of businesses. This phenomenon is known as *wasata* (links) and is understood to be an important means to manoeuvre through the social, political and economic situations. Businesses and trade enterprises are owned by families who prefer to employ close relatives as it ensures loyalty, but the demands of modern-day market economy and globalisation has forced such businesses to start employing people on the basis of their efficiency and capabilities, and not only on the basis of kinship (Saddi et al., 2009). Education and training have become engines for acquiring skills and employment and hereditary professions have become nearly negligible. Kin-based organisation has

become nearly obsolete in economic sphere but not in other aspects, especially political and social realms. Politics remains a family affair and except for some civil society organisations (Montagu, 2010), it is families that dominate public life from community to national level.

Significantly, the tribal idea of respecting authority and expecting generosity has been an important factor in sustenance of the political system. The ruling family, thus, has formed a largely generous notion of the monarchy whereby the King is supposed to be the patriarch or guardian of a family (Al-Yassini, 1985; Sharabi, 1988). The patrimonial system, characteristic of a tribal setting, enmeshed with modern idea of state is implemented on a larger setting, thereby giving the ruling family a strong support base among the people. The rule of a kin-group has been accepted and perpetuated and is common to many other countries in the Arab world (Billingsley, 2010). The historical nature of this emphasis on *asabiya* in public life in Arab societies can be understood through the works of from the 14th century Arab philosopher Ibn Khaldun's who puts kinship above religion and authority in determining the political organisation in the Arab societies (Dawood, 2005: 96-103). Contemporary scholars too articulate the significance of kinship ties in political organisation in the Arab world including in republican regimes where dominant families have appropriated power (Hourani, 1983; Hourani, 1990; Al-Thakeb, 1985; Kostiner, 1990; Kostiner, 1993; Baram, 1997; Billingsley, 2010). Anthony Billingsley observes "Despite the effects of modernity, urbanisation and the intrusiveness of the security state, some of the most fundamental decisions taken by Arab rulers, be they monarchs or presidents, are deeply influenced by considerations of family and tribal loyalty and cohesion" (Billingsley, 2010: 23).

The significance of kinship in Saudi political system and decision making process is no secret; for example most of the key cabinet ministries, such as defence, external affairs, interior and education, have traditionally been occupied by the members of al-Saud. Similarly, provincial governors have been largely appointed from within al-Saud family or its lateral branches. Some signs of change are visible if one analyses the political history of the Kingdom and on some instances the Kings have preferred domain experts over family members. For example, technocrats such Ahmed Zaki Yamani and Gazi Algosaibi, to name a few, played important roles in earlier governments and the

appointment of Adel al-Jubair as Minister of Foreign Affairs in April 2015 is testimony to posing faith in expertise over kins but these are more exceptions than the norm.

Social life is largely organised around kinship ties and people prefer to live among families and closer to those with blood relations. It is largely the kin and close relatives who attend social events around marriages, births and deaths. In rural areas people still prefer to live in large-extended families, even though, the phenomenon of nuclear families has become prevalent in urban areas (Al-Rabdi, 2005). Though the importance of kinship in social life remains intact, the nature of socialisation has changed because of changing nature of economic and social interactions through schools, colleges, universities and work. This has affected the child socialisation as children, especially in urban areas spend more time with maids and nannies from South and Southeast Asian countries, leading to them picking their language and culture. In view of many Saudi social scientists, the breaking down of kinship ties threatens to destroy the Saudi social fabric (Abduh, 2010; Al-Mukhtar, 2014). Despite these changes, the society remains largely patriarchal. Saudi sociologist Muhammad al-Jabari (1990) argues that despite the social structural changes the framework for relationship between the various groups within the society remained 'patriarchal' in nature. Thus, structural transformations did not end the hierarchical constructs and remained inherent despite the widespread nature of economic development and created numerous issues for the vulnerable sections of the population, especially the elderly and youth (Jabari, 1990; Makki, 2011).

Issues of Elderly and Youth

Saudi elderly population is small and ageing and was not a problem till recently as traditional social structures and family life helped people live satisfactorily despite ageing. Health issues were taken care of through government sponsored facilities and financial problems did not crop up because of social security schemes. Disintegration of traditional lifestyles and shrinking family spaces have created problems as elderly people are forced to live on their own with increasing trend of nuclear family and disintegrating values that ascribed importance to taking care of elderly people. Studies suggest that structural transformation have negatively impacted the condition of elderly people and "traditional family role as provider of care to older person" has been compromised due to decline in number of extended families (Al-Gabbani, 2008). It is

suggested that mostly elderly persons prefer to live with their relatives but the number of older people living in government funded or charitable homes is increasing. A considerable number of those who do not have any relatives or means to reach such shelters face social and economic hardships, particularly those coming from less privileged backgrounds and a large section of this elderly population, "especially non-working women and men who were self employed such as animal herders, farmers, fishermen, taxi drivers" face severe hardships (ibid).

Ageing causes social challenge as some of the elderly people do not have pensions because they were self employed and once they become unable to earn livelihood and/or abandoned by their children, they face extreme hardships and fall into poverty. Only a small proportion of them receive government assistance through social security schemes because either they do not have knowledge or access to such schemes or suffer in silence to protect their dignity. The elderly population faces numerous social challenges and in the words Hussain Abusaaq:

> ... the elderly have different behaviours and needs from those of the young generation. For example, when people reach 60, their saving, consumption, and work behaviours differ from those of young people just starting out in life. People in the 60 age bracket lean towards saving less and consuming more. Also, many of them are retired, need special health care, and depend on pension funds to provide them with most of their income. From an economic perspective, there will be some concerns that the number of working people paying part of their income into pension funds is not enough to cover the retirement program due to the large number of elderly people (Abusaaq, 2015: 10).

In big cities such as Riyadh and Jeddah, it is not unusual to find elderly male or female to be begging outside mosques or market places. Though many are expatriates, some are also Saudi citizens who do not have family members to take care or who have no access to social security schemes (Quamar, 2014-15).

Youth are another vulnerable section and youth delinquency is a major problem in the Kingdom as large section of youth remain unskilled and unemployed, falling victim to drug abuse, petty crimes and religious extremism. The problem has multiplied due to changing social structure and closed socio-political environment. A long-time observer of Saudi society, Caryle Murphy, remarks:

> Born into a society that for centuries has sought to make children into exact replicas of their parents, most contemporary Saudi youths see themselves as very different from their parents in both lifestyle and aspirations. They want to travel, and while their attachment to tradition, always a major theme in Saudi culture, remains intact, it is

> evolving into a more relaxed, utilitarian-based stance in which traditions are examined for how they will enhance or complicate one's daily life (Murphy, 2013a: 6-7).

In addition to lack of employment opportunities, economic hardships and concerns for better education, the youth – both men and women – feel and aspire to have freedom in social and political spheres. Many youths argue that the need for political reforms has been delayed for a long time by the monarchy and should be taken up with urgency because the delay is adding to problems rather than resolving them (Quamar, 2014-15).

In Murphy's words: "they [the youth] express a deep desire for greater freedom and space in their personal lives, whether it be how they dress, what major they choose at university or classes they take in high school" (Murphy, 2013a: 7). It is argued that "Today, many teenage Saudis are struggling to choose between conservative ideology at home and the world outside. They are torn between tradition and modernity in a society that has made it difficult for them to form identities uniquely their own" (Faruqui, 2010). Earlier, family and traditional lifestyle helped absorb social frustration and failure in aspiration did not cause major problems because of familial support. Globalisation and urbanisation have changed the family structure and the support system is gradually weaning while social, economic and political aspirations are rising. At the same time, these changes have not led to more freedom and opening that can help people achieve their dreams leading to numerous problems and hence add to frustration.

The growing number of youths, spread of education, influences of globalisation, communication revolution and use of technology have given newer voices for people who until now had remained largely apolitical. Even though the political culture is not vibrant, demands for reforms and providing wider scope for participation in public life have increased. It can be a good sign for the larger society and the nation but faces numerous hurdles, particularly from the conservative sections that prefer tradition over modernisation. This poses substantial challenge to the government as it has to balance between the demands from both sections and is forced to tread a fine line whereby the youth and those who want more reforms can be satisfied while the conservative sections that have been loyal to the monarchy do not feel alienated. This idea of taking a middle path has not resolved problems facing the youth.

Studies suggest that problems such as drug abuse and seeking pleasure in sexual abuse and other life threatening behaviours are on the rise (Menoret, 2014). Disintegration of family lives and traditional sources of recreation activities have further created rifts in the society and frustration among the youth. Rebellious behaviour among teenage boys and girls are common and confrontation with parents or moral police is on the rise. Tension can be witnessed in public life, particularly if takes the views of the older generations and the youth, with the two giving polar opposite views (Quamar, 2014-15). Even those with religious inclinations feel rebellious due to the closed socio-political environment and lack of economic opportunities. Young women find it difficult to reconcile with the old ideas of family protection and male guardianship while being self-dependent financially. They are acquiring education and earning livelihood but are forced to live under the authority of fathers, husbands or sons which is difficult to accept for the new generation. It has been argued that:

> Saudi youths of today are more diversified and complex than earlier generations were at their age. In addition, as more and more Saudis question long-held assumptions and traditions, multiple strands of thoughts on different topics are developing in a society that has long regarded conformity as one of its highest values (Murphy, 2013a: 8).

For Saudi youth, social change has not created an atmosphere for individual freedom and political rights, which is difficult to reconcile given exposure to the outside world, where these are considered a constitutional right.

Impacts on Culture and Traditions

Changes in social structure have impacted local culture, traditions and value system and affected people's daily lives. Culture and tradition evolve over generations but are affected by social change and are learned, relearned, and formed and reformed. Cultural and traditional practices are affected by structural changes and can lead to far-reaching transformation in the "collective whole" of human living experiences (Ellwood, 1918; Parsons, 1951). At the same time, cultures and traditions remain constant and have a sense of continuity associated with them and the changes are dependent on a variety of factors including religion and faith, which is discussed separately in Chapter Seven. Hence, one sees an inherent paradox in the phenomena understood as culture and tradition as it changes with time but can retain its core essence.

Modernisation and social change has impacted Saudi culture and traditions including customs and rituals related to birth, death, marriage, prayer and other social events,

eating and dressing habits and recreational activities. The notion of belonging to an Arab-Islamic heritage continues to play a dominant role in determining these issues but other factors such as education, financial affluence, mass media and globalisation have made a significant impact. Studies have examined the homogenising nature of changes or destruction of the heterogeneity that existed in the local cultures and traditions due to differences in regional origin, ways of living and descent (Hamza, 2002; Long, 2005). For example, *hadari* (town), *badu* (Bedouin) and *rifi* (village) lifestyles had unique cultural practices different from each other, but with the changing lifestyles and fast-paced urbanisation, the unique cultural practices and traditional lifestyles are lost and cultural adoption and development of towns and cities have brought a sense of homogeneity.

Despite the homogenising effects of economic modernisation, and globalisation, some cultural heterogeneity persists. For example, in the Hejaz region customs and rituals associated with celebrating birth and marriage and mourning the dead are different in comparison to Najd and this is true for other regions like Hasa, Najran and Hail (Yamani, 2004). Region specific linguistic variations in terms of dialects, accent and use of words are present and in different parts of the Peninsula traditional styles of poetry have their own unique flavour (Hamza, 2002). Local cultural festivals such as Unaizah and Janadiriyah have a distinct feel to them (Al-Kharidli, 2008). Scholars suggest that even in urban areas that are exposed to impacts of modernisation and globalisation have maintained some traits of the past in modern architecture through conscious efforts in preserving the local heritage (Al-Naim, 2008). Thus, public buildings such as libraries, mosques and universities carry some unique local trends and it is more visible in the Eastern and Southern provinces.

Style of dressing and food habits vary in different regions despite some specific features that are visible pan-Kingdom. For example, both men and women are supposed to cover their heads, a practice that is visible in all regions. Traditionally, it might have become necessary because of harsh climatic conditions but in contemporary times, head coverings are more a part of cultural ethos than climatic conditions. The dressing style is similar for most regions with some minor variations. Men largely wear a white cotton robe known as *thob* with white head-cloth called *ghutra* held tightly around the head

with *iqal* (a braided cord). The colour and styling of the head gear however vary; for example, a red-and-white checked cloth called *shmagh* is another popular head gear held with the *iqal*, while some Hejazi men are found to be wearing white turban know as *umama* (Yamani, 2004; Zuhur, 2011). Shia clerics also prefer to wear *umama* but colours vary from black and white depending on social status and prestige. Bedouin style of wearing the *ghutra* differs and some variations can be noticed among men belonging to coastal regions along the Gulf. Similarly, people with Yemeni origin or those living in bordering areas close to Yemen prefer to wear coloured *thob* and *ghutra* is tied on head without *iqal*.

In Hejaz region, clothing among both men and women differ in comparison to other regions due to its traditionally cosmopolitan nature; for example, *thob* and *ghutra* or *shmagh* can be seen less in numbers and the colour also varies. Women are invariably found to be dressed in black *abaya* with a long scarf to cover head and upper portion of body. Women are largely seen with face veil (*niqab*) with only their eyes visible. With changing lifestyles, some changes in women clothing can also be located. In urban areas some women can be seen without face veil, while changing fashion has affected *abaya* to make it more attractive and update with embroidered and special designs. However, inside the *abaya* women, particularly the young, prefer to dress in modern western dressing with colourful tops and trousers (Arasli, 2008; Zuhur, 2011). The variation in dressing style of women from Najd, Hejaz and other regions have been nearly lost, at least in public, because of strict imposition of the dress code by the Wahhabi ulema (Yamani, 2004).

Changes in dietary habits and etiquettes with changing lifestyles can be located in urban areas. Consumption of goods that was previously unimaginable became possible due to better transportation and storage facilities and changed people's habits. The staple food, with some regional and lifestyle variations, mainly consists of bread, made from wheat flour, dates, dairy products and rice and meat preparations such as *kabsa* (a preparation of rice and meat). Chicken and lamb are largely used for meat while goat and camel are reared for their milk, though in many places beef and camel and goat meat are also relished. These can be prepared in different ways and every region and tribe have some special dishes; for example, Hejaz has a number of local specialities such as *sobyah* (a

traditional cold drink used specially during Ramadan) and *ful* (a preparation of chickpeas and local spices savoured with bread). People largely prefer to eat with hands and with family. Changes have occurred in dietary habits with markets full of branded Western and Chinese fast-foods and Indian, Pakistani and Malaysian restaurants are popular among locals and expatriates (Lowton, 2013). The changing lifestyles and increased consumption of fast-food and aerated drink have been found to be a major factor for rise in obesity among Saudi children and youth (Al-Rethaiaa et al., 2010).

Unlike food habits and dressing styles, customs and rituals related to birth, marriage and funeral have remained immune from outside influences or globalisation but some of the norms have changed over time. Wahhabism has affected some of the notions attached with birth and death as it discourages elaborate celebrations or loud and public mourning thus, in most circumstances it remains quieter and confined to family and friends. Variations due to regional differences, tribal affiliations and sectarian denomination can be seen in these aspects as well. Like any other society birth is celebrated, in a more elaborate form. Patriarchal notions make it more joyful to have a baby boy than girl, and traditionally women with large number of male children are more respected. Women with children are respected in comparison to women who cannot bear a child. This at times may even cause a man to divorce his wife (Lipsky, 1959; Abduh, 2010).

Rituals around death and funeral have some unique regional variations. Shia and Hejazi rituals and customs are different compared to Najdi traditions. Some of the traditionally prevalent practices such as reading Quranic verses in front of dead or grave have become obsolete or are practiced discreetly as they are regarded as un-Islamic by Wahhabi ulema. In Najdi-Wahhabi tradition leaving a mark for the grave is also prohibited and people are not allowed to visit graves, though this was a major practice in many families in Hejaz and formed an important part of Shia and Sufi funeral traditions (Yamani, 2004). There are other specific rituals such as immediate burial after death, which is preceded by ceremonial prayer for the departed. Mourning can continue for days and in some cases months but largely three-day mourning (*azza*) is practiced. Verbal tributes to the dead through recital of verses (*sher*) are commonly practiced in all parts (Zuhur, 2011). People are expected to convey their condolences to the family of

the deceased and family expects friends and relatives to attend the funeral as well as *majlis* organised for mourning.

Marriage ceremonies are usually elaborate and presence of families and friends is expected. Elaborate preparations are made for marriage celebrations and ceremonial feast is organised by the groom's family for neighbours and family. Celebrations in some parts or families can continue for days and may include traditional music, songs and dance (Zuhur, 2011). Mostly, men and women quarters are clearly demarcated and intermixing is very rare. Celebrations might include fireworks and gunshots depending on the social status and financial conditions of the family (Al-Aqeel, 2013). Marriage parties may include flashy vehicles, ceremonial clapping and specific nasal noises made by women. In some circumstances, people may invite professional folk dancers and singers to perform (Aziz, 2011). Traditionally, marriage celebrations were not this elaborate and were largely confined to feasts and traditional singing, music and dance. With changing lifestyles and influx of wealth, celebrations have become elaborate.

Recreational activities, poetry, literature, visual arts, music, sports and other such areas have witnessed changes due to impacts of modernisation and globalisation. While Bedouin poetry is legendary, the culture of literary prose is weak (Hamza, 2002). The literary scene has transformed to a large extent, particularly due to influence from the literary revivalist movement in the Levant and Egypt in the early and mid-twentieth century. Contemporary literary scene is largely influenced by local culture and events and has started to have a strong market in some parts but reading habits remain limited. There are a number of poets and writers who have made a mark such as Abdul Rahman al-Munif (1933-2004) who is regarded as one of the most prominent novelists in modern Arabic literature. Other lesser known contemporary writers include Rajaa al-Amin, Ahmed al-Duwahi and Rajaa al-Sanae. Some of the women poets and writers have also achieved fame such as Nimah Ismail Nawwah, Laila al-Giuhni and Siba Al Herz (Zuhur, 2011).

Except for football, sports culture is rudimentary. Football is popular and there are a number of clubs such as *Al-Ahli* based in Jeddah and *Al-Hilal* based in Riyadh that enjoy large fan base. Other sports such as horse racing, motor racing and martial arts are

keenly followed. Traditional sports such as camel racing, falconry and hunting remain popular among men. Contemporary music and arts scene is not very strong but towards late 2000s Riyadh has seen establishment of some art studios and some of the local music albums have become popular through social media and internet. For example, Alaa Wardi, a popular contemporary Saudi musician of Iranian descent, has released many albums and music videos and has more than 300,000 followers on his YouTube page. His music are unique as he does not uses western musical instruments and relies more on human sounds and clapping and uses local instruments that are allowed under Islamic *shari'a*.

Morality and ethics are another important area that contributes to local culture and tradition and form an important part of the local but can equally adhere to the universal. For example, ideas such as theft and lies being bad are universal and are understood as bad in all parts of the world. However, there can be unique local ideas that may guide moral and ethical behaviour. In Saudi Arabia, morality and ethics are largely guided by two important factors – Islam and tribal heritage. All societies feel pride in their culture and feel attached to morality and ethics and keep them dear but moral and ethical issues arouse extreme reactions in the Kingdom. To some extent there seems to be an obsession towards preservation of public morality and ethics and this mainly emanates from religious vigour of Wahhabi Islam.

Perhaps Saudi Arabia would be the only country to maintain a state-agency for keeping the moral behaviour of its population under control and *mutawwa* or the religious police officially known as *Committee for Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice* are infamous for its forcible implementation of morality in public. Certain actions that are supposed to be un-Islamic are not acceptable in public life and men and women are supposed to wear 'modestly' and are not allowed to intermix. Public spaces in urban areas are guarded to keep people away from morally 'decadent' behaviour. Religious police or *mutawwa* are highly despised by some, particularly the young, but they continue to hold powers allowing them to monitor people's behaviour. In fact, one of the major hurdles to allowing women to drive has been the opposition of the religious sections and ulema that term it as immoral and which according to them will lead to further degradation in social life (GPSRI, n.d.).

This guarding of public morality has caused numerous serious problems and has even cause deaths; for example, in March 2002, 15 young girls lost their lives due to fire in an elementary girl's school in Mecca, because the *mutawwa* did not allow the firemen to enter the school as the girls were not wearing *hijab* (head scarf). Incidents of irresponsible behaviour of *mutawwa* leading to brawls and fights are regularly reported in local media. Road chases by *mutawwa* causing accidents and deaths are common. In one of the incidents in al-Baha in south-western region, four members of the religious police chased a vehicle as the stereo in their car was loud. The chase ended in an accident leading to the death of Abdul Rahman al-Gamdi and injuries to his wife and their two children (*Gulf News*, 2012a). The incident was widely reported in media and lead to widespread criticisms and demands for reforms of the religious police.

The issue of morality and ethics have witnessed minor changes in certain aspects and lately some restrictions have been placed on the religious police (*BBC News*, 2012). Some prevalent ideas which were taken as unethical and immoral have become acceptable; for example, notions about population control have witnessed some changes. Similarly, idea around organ donation which was previously considered unethical has started to change despite resistance from some quarters (Taher, 2005; *Arab News*, 2013a). The director general of Saudi Centre for Organ Transplantation stated in one of the reports that "92 per cent of the families of brain dead patients [are] consenting to donation when they know that it was the choice of the deceased" (Habib, 2013).

The structural changes have also indirectly proved detrimental to some of the significant aspects of life, most importantly degradation and destruction of traditional methods of architecture and settlement (Eben Saleh, 1998). Massive economic growth and rapid urbanisation has added to the problem leading to destruction of environmentally vulnerable areas around oases and villages. Globalisation and increased interconnectedness with the world in terms of trade, travel, communication and interactions further made a profound impact on all aspects of Saudi life and many lament that it had led to cultural and environmental degradations.

Conclusion

The tribal character of the Saudi society remain intact but the socioeconomic and political functions of tribes have changed leading to changes in the nature of the social interactions, which also affects individuals and collective life. This juxtaposed with oil induced economic modernisation together with political socio-political transformation and education has affected the social divisions and hierarchies and led to emergence of class-based social stratification. At the same time, tribe and kinship ties remain the most important marker of identity, even though new factors have started to impact individuals' identities. The changing nature of social interactions is visible in social institutions such as family, marriage and kinship. It is not only the modes of individual and collective interactions that have changed but the nature of these social institutions too have accepted changes due to factors such as economic growth, modernisation, education and globalisation. It has created issues for vulnerable sections of the population, more importantly for the elderly and young. It has made impacts on various aspects of local culture and tradition including customs and rituals, lifestyle and morality and public behaviour. However, one of the most important aspects of this structural transformation is the changing status of women who negotiate modernity within the constraints created by tradition and religious restrictions.

Chapter Six

Status of Women

Saudi Arabia is often criticised, especially in the West, for being one of the worst countries in terms of its treatment of women (Mtango, 2004; Pharaon, 2004; Le Renard, 2008; Buys and Macuiba, 2012; Al-Rasheed, 2013) and some of these criticisms are legitimate as they face systematic discrimination in social, political and economic domains and are segregated in public. Saudi women have to cope up with myriad of problems on a daily basis. Strict gender segregation is enforced in public and to a lesser degree in private. Social, economic, political and legal systems and practices are heavily loaded against women. *Shari'a* laws, as interpreted by the Wahhabi Islam, consider them to be minors, hence making girls and women dependent on male guardians throughout their life. As dependents, they have to seek the formal consent of their legal guardians even for routine decisions and activities such as admission into university, travel abroad, consult hospital and undergo surgery or to seek employment. Tribal dominated customs do not approve of women going out of their homes alone for education, employment or social activities. Under such socio-religious constraints, the life of a Saudi woman is a daily struggle and even simple chores of grocery shopping, visiting a relative or commuting from one place to another is an ordeal.

The daily struggle of a Saudi woman runs deep in the system and is entangled in the socio-cultural history of the Kingdom (Doumato, 1992; Doumato, 1999; Moghadam, 2003; Nashat and Tucker, 1999; Al-Rasheed, 2013). Representation of women in the judiciary, media, sports, economy, and business is low and until recently, their political participation was unimaginable. Female participation in civil society and public affairs is negligible as the closed system does not allow much scope even for a male-dominated independent civil society (Montagu, 2010). In addition, the society is deeply patriarchal and the gendering process creates a 'male-female partner' narrative and allocates authority and control to men, thereby leaving no scope for female individuality. Above

all, problems of misogyny and sexual exploitation including, domestic violence, sexual abuse, child marriage and polygamy are widespread.

Therefore, the ability of Saudi women to make their mark in numerous fields in recent years and their constant struggle to push the boundaries set by the social order and customs have to be understood within this broader context. Because of the continuous pressures from below, conditions of women have been improving slowly and are visible in areas such as education, healthcare and family status and through their participation in the economy. The most important aspect of this progress is modern education that helped women push the boundaries of tradition and customs. Economic imperatives have gradually opened the labour market and in recent times, media and civil-society have been debating the condition and status of women thereby creating awareness about their rights and plights. Economic modernisation and globalisation have contributed to changing attitude towards women. Reform initiatives by the monarchy are also instrumental in improving the participation of women in many fields. Resultantly, their representation in education, economy, fashion and design industry, media and civil society and other spheres has shown signs of improvement.

Accessibility to education for women has a profound impact upon their social conditions (Bahry, 1982; Jamal, 1988; Al Rawaf and Simmons, 1991; Zaidan, 2000; Hamdan, 2005; AlMunajjed, 2009). This led to the opening of new fields such as engineering, law, business etc that were previously a taboo. It has facilitated participation of women in the labour force providing a degree of financial independence to some women. Many who are educated and contribute to family income become vocal about their rights within the family and society. This is reflected in the increasing visibility of women in media and public sphere and articulation of their needs and rights (Sakr, 2008; Al Sadiq and Hausheer, 2014). On the other hand, this trend has not diminished or ended practices that hinder women's participation as their legal status, gender-segregation, movement restrictions and so on (Doumato, 1999; Baki, 2004; Al-Rasheed, 2013).

The public education system continues to be inherently discriminatory towards women not only in terms of segregated spaces but also because of variations in the curriculum

and less participation in disciplines that are considered masculine. This discriminatory nature, which excludes women, has prevented realisation of their potential in attaining larger social, economic and political responsibilities (Doumato, 1999; Baki, 2004). Saudi women deal with an inherent dichotomy and struggle to manage tradition and modernity. As Nesta Ramazani observes:

> Vigorously pursuing higher education, careers and financial independence, the new Saudi working woman lives in two separate worlds – that of professionalism, as an active, contributing member of society and that of the protected cloistered female, bound by tradition, veiled in public, forbidden to drive a car or travel unless accompanied by a man (Ramazani, 1985: 259).

Evidently, women are forced to balance between traditional standards of male authority and gender segregation while trying to embrace modern ideals of leading an independent life.

The changing social structure discussed in Chapter Five impacts status of women and thus decision making within families has been moving towards individuality thereby giving women some scope to choose a direction in their life even when social customs continue to demand adherence. For example, in perusing higher education, employment or marriage, women are considered qualified and matured enough to make the choice but are required to take permission of their male guardians. The same logic is extended to their freedom of movement hence have to be accompanied by a male. This logic creates a peculiar situation of Saudi women being 'accompanied' by an 'unrelated' male driver, which is otherwise considered *haraam* (prohibited).

At times, modernisation has adversely affected the conditions of women. Traditionally Saudi women had wielded more power than generally understood, particularly in private domains, such as in marriage and other important rituals. For example, in the nomadic or semi-nomadic life of the past, women did not face restrictions especially in terms of their movements outside the household. Their full economic participation in running the family enabled them to ride camel or use other modes of transport (Katakura, 1977; Altorki and Cole, 1989). They pursued an active social life beyond their immediate families and engaged with their clans and tribes. In some ways, the process of modernisation deprived them of their traditional economic subsistence and mobility as they were increasingly excluded from participation in the modernised economies (Altorki, 1977; Altorki, 1986). The types of employment made available by

modernisation could not be performed by Saudi women due to lack of education and training. They were excluded from modern education which was primarily geared towards employment even though the traditional religious studies continued to be available to them. The process of urbanisation and movement towards sedentary lifestyle curbed the freedom, especially in terms of employment and movement, enjoyed by the Saudi women in the past.

The Saudi political structures fused through Islam and tradition prevents meaningful progress in the condition of women despite them reaching a higher degree in education and healthcare. Thus, young Saudi women face problems in realizing their aspirations transcending the boundaries of customs and norms (Doumato, 2003; Al-Rasheed, 2013; Murphy, 2013a). These were compounded by state policies and economic developments that were biased towards urbanisation and settled population, eventually creating separate spheres for men and women in public and private lives and in the process strengthening the socio-religious custom of gender segregation (Le Renard, 2008; Al-Rasheed, 2006; Al-Rasheed, 2013). This is in spite of Saudi society making strides in terms of modernisation, economic advancement, improved social indicators and infrastructure.

Within the context of the reforms process and social structural changes, the status of Saudi women has been a major arena of debate and contestation over the domination of the religious-traditional sections. At one level, changes in society and forces of reforms and globalisation have made significant progress in generating a debate over status of women. In many ways, the prolonged domination of the conservative ulema in restricting women to the household stands challenged as a growing number of women are benefiting from education and joining the labour force. Though largely state patronized, the media has created a space for women to raise issues concerning them and debate their status. King Abdullah’s reign witnessed a number of moves that have potentials to further status of women.

This chapter discusses status of Saudi women within the context of their successes and impediments. It further delves into the factors that have helped women make progress and examines the problems which obstruct their empowerment. It identifies the status of

women as a significant component of the social reform process, and hence, a key indicator for its success. The chapter is divided into four sections; the first examines the early impacts of modernisation on condition of Saudi women, and the second analyses the progresses and achievements of Saudi women. In the third section, impediments to restrictions and discrimination against Saudi women are discussed in detail. The fourth section contextualises condition of Saudi women within the local debates on gender, femininity and status of women.

Early Impacts of Modernisation

In a tribal-patriarchal society traditional ways of subsistence had scope for Saudi women to have a degree of freedom and participation outside the household. Women had an active involvement in family farms, reared camels, goats and chicken, helped in fishing, participated in social life for leisure and recreation and were at the forefront during festivities and mourning (Katakura, 1977; Altorki and Cole, 1989). They were an integral part of the caravan that moved in search of pastoral lands, rode camels, were responsible for many aspects of tribal life such as tendering for the elderly and children and even practiced traditional forms of medicine (Al-Khateeb, 1981; Al-Khateeb, 2007). Even under patriarchy, they were responsible for family and children when men were away for trade or other purposes. At least within the context of their family, clan and tribal environment, women had considerable leeway, space and freedom of action.

Ironically, the introduction of modernisation in the 1950s and 1960s adversely affected the public as well as private spaces of Saudi women and they came to be excluded from many aspects of economic as well as social life. The traditional dependence on farming and oases started giving way to oil-dependent economy and employment model. Traditional roles played by women in activities such as farming and animal rearing became redundant in the oil-induced welfare state model (Altorki, 1977; Altorki, 1986). As national and hence individual affluence increased, women were confined to the household and their role in the economy became irrelevant. Modernisation of the education meant imparting of knowledge geared towards oil-dependent economy and as non-religious subjects became an integral part of the education system, women became the primary victim. So long as religion was the primary function of education, women

were part of that process. However, towards enlisting their support in introducing modern education, Saudi rulers made the ulema responsible for education who excluded women. For example, in 1930 a group of ulema criticised Ibn Saud's education policy and as a result women's education was placed under the supervision of ulema who already controlled religious and judicial affairs (Al-Yassini, 1985: 50, 68; Al-Rasheed, 2013: 77).

Towards ensuring Wahhabi doctrine, the ulema curbed social life of the women and excluded them from public life as it was considered a recipe for evil (El Fadl, 2001a). Further, the patriarchal social and cultural constructions prevented and delayed benefits of the modernisation to reach women (Altorki, 1977; Abu-Lughod, 2002; Al-Rasheed, 2013). Affluence enabled Saudi men to maintain more than one household and the phenomenon of polygamy increased. Though multiple marriages are permitted under Islam, they were not widespread before the oil boom but increased with growing affluence (Al-Khateeb, 2007). Furthermore, the domination of Najdi-Wahhabi culture upon other populations ensured sexual segregation and confined women's social role to only child rearing (Yamani, 2004).

The debate over the need for women's education though began in the late 1950s, it gained momentum during Faisal's reign (1964-1975), when it was articulated that,

> ...the purpose of educating a girl is to bring her up in a proper Islamic way so as to perform her duty in life, be an ideal and successful housewife and a good mother, ready to do jobs suitable to her nature such as teaching, nursing and medical treatment (cited in Al-Rasheed, 2013: 90).

The education policy maintained the need for educating women within an Islamic framework to counter opposition from the ulema (Al-Aqil, 2005; Al-Eisa, 2009). Gradually, girls' education was introduced in 1961 and colleges/universities were opened for women in the 1970s. The process reached a major milestone in 2008-09 when women constituted more than 50 per cent of students who graduated from the universities.

Systemic discrimination remained as the ulema were given control over modern education in terms of curriculum and pedagogy. Gradually, while the general education came under the control of technocrats, female education remained as the exclusive control of the clergy until 2002 (Prokop, 2003). Thus, women were educated only in a

few disciplines deemed necessary such as Islamic education, teaching and medicine. While they created limited employment opportunities, women could take up jobs only with the permission of their male 'guardians' and that too only in dire circumstances (Al-Khateeb, 2007). Another important aspect that marked improvement during this phase was healthcare and maternal and child care facilities that started to spread leading to improvement in health indicators for women such as decline in maternal mortality and fertility rates (Chapter Four). The early impacts of modernisation on status of women was marked by improvements in economic and health indicators but deterioration in their family and social lives with lesser opportunities for mobility, socialisation and economic participation, especially when compared to the tribal and nomadic life.

Progress and Achievements

The early 1990s marked remarkable changes, especially for public demands for reforms. The period is crucial because those demanding reforms included prominent women intellectuals and demands included improvement in conditions of Saudi women (Dekmejian, 2003; Raphaeli, 2005). The state was forced to take note and measures to improve educational and employment opportunities for women were introduced. During the period under research, one of the most important changes in condition of women is their broader participation in the field of education and their entry in the job market, entrepreneurship and leadership positions.

One of the most significant developments in the 1990s was opening of female sections in religious institutions. Earlier, only a few religious institutions such as the Umm al-Qura (1971) and Imam Muhammad bin Saud Islamic University (1984) were available for female. Towards creating opportunities religious education institutions opened female sections leading to increase in number of female religious graduates. It not only provided many women with educational opportunities but also "escape from the domestic space, filled as it is with sometimes suffocating obligations" (Le Renard, 2008: 623). Further, it created public sphere as women religious scholars and preachers gained access to uncharted spaces such as university departments, charitable organisations and mosques. Though these were segregated spaces and focused on issues

of women, in the words of Amélie Le Renard, they allowed women to "achieve, to some extent, an emancipation from domestic duties" (ibid).

The issue of joblessness and unemployment among the Saudis was another important agenda that was raised by those demanding reforms. The idea of Saudisation of the labour force led to advocates of women's rights to argue that women should be allowed in the work force and the state agreed with the demand through segregation. Thus, many private sector companies started to hire Saudi female employees as it was a business incentive to attract female clientele. For example, private banks came with the idea of female only branches to attract female patrons (AlMunajjed, 1997). Hiring Saudi women became cost effective due to government's effort at nationalisation of jobs (Niblock and Malik, 2007).

Further the post-11 September debate inside the Kingdom created some space for women to voice their concerns on issues of their rights and need for job opportunities, albeit within state patronisation. Prominent women in various fields took lead to express their views and were occasionally encouraged and rewarded (Al-Ahmadi, 2011). Female members of the ruling family and women with liberal, modernist and reformist leanings took active interest in promoting women's rights and freedom. For example, King Abdullah's daughter Adela became one of the most vocal and visible advocates of women's rights and spoke about the needs for improvement in opportunities for women and raised questions regarding their rights. Other al-Saud women such as Luluwah al-Faisal (daughter of King Faisal), Basmah al-Saud (daughter of King Saud), Reema al-Saud (grand-daughter of Crown Prince Sultan) and Hussa al-Saud (daughter of King Salman) also took lead in raising concerns about the condition of Saudi women. It helped create some space for more women to follow (Syeed and Zafar, 2014). They worked towards creating opportunities for women in different sectors including education and business and are considered leading voices for reforms (Fatany, 2013a). Their family status enabled them to be vocal on issues concerning women and being independent and intellectual they did not pursue a career but sought to create social awareness regarding the status of Saudi women.

State patronage of female ‘emancipation’ and initiatives to promote their participation in the ‘nation building’ was another noticeable difference since the 1990s. The process was further strengthened under King Abdullah.

Initiatives under Abdullah

One of the major factors paving the way for the participation of women in public life was steps taken by Abdullah as *de facto* ruler (1995-2005) and King (2005-15), who sought to promote their rights and worked towards expanding their social boundaries (Fatany, 2013a; Murphy, 2015; Al-Haidari, 2015; Al-Jarousha, 2015). Leaning towards reforms and modernisation and endorsement of the rights and role of women, he encouraged intellectuals to take interest in promoting the cause of *tamkin al-mara*` (women empowerment). Given the condition of Saudi women, ‘empowerment’ might look inappropriate, nevertheless Abdullah initiated a debate on ‘women empowerment’ and was seen receptive to better participation of women in public life.

Abdullah’s personal interest in improving facilities and opportunities for women in education and economy and allowing them in leadership positions created a conducive environment to debate conservative views regarding the place of women. Policies and programmes of the government inspired various ministries, departments and institutions to take measures for improving facilities, services and opportunities for women (Al-Mani, 2014). On numerous occasions, he invited and personally received women in the Royal Court and was seen shaking hands with them, which under normal circumstances could be interpreted as *fitna* (evil). He received female delegations, accepted their petitions, gave assurances of improvement in the social conditions, conferred awards to women scientists, doctors, journalists and academics and appointed them in leadership positions.

Figure 7.1: Dr. Khawla Al-Kuraya receiving King Abdulaziz Medal, 2009

Source: *Arab News* (2010).

Note: Not only the King was shaking hands of a women, Dr. Al-Kuraya was not wearing the traditional *naqab* (face veil), which in normal circumstances would have evoked criticisms from the ulema.

Under Abdullah's watch women increasingly started to participate in public debates through traditional and new media on variety of issues, most importantly on issues and problems faced by women. At the same time, advocacy groups and organisations aimed at promoting women's rights became part of the civil society and were supported by powerful princesses and influential elites (Al-Rasheed, 2013). Female participation in labour force increased, especially in banking, retail, hospitality, real estate and IT sectors that were not open for them until recently (AlMunajjed, 2010b). Likewise, female engagement in civil society through voluntary work, charity organisations, women's associations and professional guilds can be noticed (Montagu, 2010). His efforts towards ending marginalisation of women is recognised in local media and upon his death on 23 January 2015 some Saudi columnists, men and women, termed his reign as "golden era" for Saudi women (Muhammad, 2015; Al-Haideri, 2015; Ja'aferi, 2015).

Some of the major initiatives taken or facilitated by Abdullah towards women include the following[1]:

- In November 1999, it was announced that women would be issued identity cards (women were listed in their legal guardian's identity cards) and the process started in November 2001. In 2006, it was made mandatory for women to have identity cards to make financial and business transactions.
- In August 2000, the Human Resource Development Fund (*Hadaf*) was established that among others, aims to improve economic participation of women by providing financial support and training.
- In September 2000, the Kingdom ratified the UN Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).
- In March 2002, the separate Directorate for Girl's Education that existed since 1961 was merged with the Ministry of Education and this limited the control of the ulema upon female education.

[1] Sources: Royal Decree, 2000; Prokop, 2003; Dekmejian, 2003; *Asharq Al-Awsat*, 2005; MoE, 2006; AlMunajjed, 2010b; Fatany, 2013a; Thompson, 2014.

- In January 2003, the then Crown Prince met a women delegation and accepted their petition that demanded improvements in educational and economic opportunities for women.
- A new school curriculum was designed in 2004 and a new education policy was implemented in 2005. They ended gender discrimination in education and for the first time provided for same curriculum and text books for boys and girls and sought to increase female participation in professional education.
- Sayedah Khadija bint Khuwailid Center was founded in Jeddah in November 2004 under the patronage of Princess Adela—Abdullah's daughter—as an advocacy organisation to promote Saudi women entrepreneurs.
- The third national dialogue organized by King Abdulaziz Center for National Dialogue (*Markaz Malik Abdulaziz li al-Hiwar al-Watani*) held in Mecca in June 2004 deliberated on condition of women. The gathering included 35 women who highlighted the importance of women's right in Islam and the need for better opportunities for Saudi women in different aspects of life.
- In 2005 two women–Lama al-Suleiman and Nashwa Taher–were elected as member of Board of Directors (BoD) in the Jeddah Chamber of Commerce and Industry (JCCI). This was the first time women had contested any elections in Saudi Arabia.
- Legal education was opened for women with effect from the academic year 2005.
- In 2007, a new university exclusively for woman, Princess Nourah bint Abdulrahman University was founded and its state-of-the-art campus with a capacity of 50,000 students, faculty and staff was inaugurated in Riyadh in May 2011.
- In 2008, the ban on single women renting hotel rooms was lifted facilitating travel of women within the Kingdom.
- In 2009, a co-educational university, King Abdullah University of Science and Technology, the only institution of its kind in the Kingdom was inaugurated.
- Norah al-Fayez, an educationist was appointed Deputy Minister of Education in-charge of girl's education in 2009. Till date she is the only women to hold a

ministerial position in the Saudi government and no woman has ever been named a full cabinet minister since the founding of the Kingdom in 1932.

- Khawla bint Sami al-Kuraya (**Figure 7.1**), a cancer research scientist at the King Faisal Specialist Hospital, Riyadh, was awarded the King Abdulaziz medal for her contribution to medical research in 2009. This was a first time the scientific accomplishment of a Saudi woman was recognized.

The reforms initiatives continued and in some cases intensified after the outbreak of popular protests in many Arab countries, the timeframe for this research. These include[2]:

- In September 2011 at the time of the second municipal elections in the Kingdom, it was announced that women would be appointed in *Majlis al-Shura* and would be allowed to vote and participate in municipal elections due in December 2015.
- In 2012, an industrial city for women was established in Hofuf, in the Eastern Province, which is expected to employ nearly 5,000 women in various industries including garment and textile, pharmaceutical and food-processing.
- In September 2012 Mody al-Khalaf was appointed Assistant Attaché for cultural and social affairs in Saudi embassy in the United States in recognition of her outstanding achievements in promoting the bilateral relations.
- In September 2012, Malak al-Nory became the first women to be conferred the Ibn Khaldun Fellowship supported by the King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals and Saudi Aramco to pursue her research at Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
- Dalma Rushdi Malhas participated in the Equestrian competition in 2012 Summer Olympics in Singapore.
- Two female athletes–800 meter-runner Sarah Attar and Judoka Wojdan Shaherkani–were nominated as part of the Saudi contingent to London Olympic Games, 2012.

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[2] Sources: Al-Rashid, 2012; Samar Fatany, 2013a; Khan, F., 2014; Khan, G. A., 2014.

- For the first time in January 2013, 30 women were nominated for a four-year term to the 150-member *Majlis al-Shura* that is functioning since 1993.
- In June 2013, the General Presidency of Youth Welfare granted licence to a women sports centre, a first in Saudi history.
- In 2013, Bayan Mahmoud al-Zahran became the first Saudi women to be issued a license to practice law in Saudi courts.
- 60 women were appointed as legal researchers, document controllers and in other administrative positions in Court of Appeal across Saudi Arabia in 2013.
- In August 2013, the Council of Ministers passed a law against domestic violence and child abuse for the first time in Saudi history.
- The *Saudi Industrial Property Authority* launched a project to develop an industrial city for women workers in Yanbu in early 2014.
- Hanadi al-Hindi became the first Saudi women to be issued professional license to fly planes in 2014.
- In December 2014, Fatimah Al-Rashoud was appointed head of Women Guidance Committee in the General Presidency of the Two Holy Mosques, the committee looks after the administration of Kaaba in Mecca and Prophet's Mosque in Medina.

Many other steps were taken during Abdullah's reign indicate his personal interest in promoting the cause of women. He periodically directed various ministries and departments to appoint women in important administrative and advisory positions to reflect his sensitivity towards the needs of women in government decisions and policy implementations (Quamar, 2014-15).

These initiatives and steps did indicating the direction of the public discourse on women's rights and their space outside the household. Nonetheless, as would be discussed, measures introduced by Abdullah did not remove all the barriers before greater public role for women but is gradually challenging some of the long-established notions and norms pertaining to women and their role within and outside homes. Apart from the general awareness about public role for women, it is possible to identify some specific fields such as education, economic participation, family status and healthcare,

media and civil society and art and fashion industry where Saudi women have made noticeable gains since the 1990s.

Education

One of the foremost areas where Saudi women have made significant gains is education which witnessed reforms and opening of new avenues. These in turn have contributed to changes in other areas. Public education for girls was introduced in 1961 or more than four decades after the initial policy for public education were laid down and nearly three decades after the establishment of the Kingdom. This speaks volumes about internal resistance against educating women. The Directorate General of Education was established in 1925 to promote modern education among boys and even this was met with opposition from religious and tribal leaders (Al-Yassini, 1985). Facing fierce resistance from large sections of the society Ibn Saud could not even contemplate girl’s education. Religious leaders, traditional elements and the allies of the al-Saud were opposed to the introduction of public education for girls on the ground that it could lead to moral and social degeneration. It was argued that household was the right place for women and there was no need to impart modern education which would encourage evil in the society (Al-Badah, 2010; Al-Rasheed, 2013).

Modern education for girls had to wait until 1961 when Queen Iffat, wife of King Faisal and a strong advocate for female education, prevailed over the monarch (Kèchichian, 2008). Till then only a few elite families ensured education for their girls either by employing lady tutors at home or sending their girls to boarding schools in Beirut, Cairo and Damascus (Altorki, 1986). According to Madawi Al-Rasheed these girls “belonged to the first generation of Saudi bureaucrats and merchants, mainly resident in the cities of the Hijaz and in Riyadh” (Al-Rasheed, 2013: 86). Further, “The daughters of the first generation of Saudis whose jobs required extended periods of residence abroad were the first to benefit from the opportunity to acquire formal education” (ibid). Queen Iffat had a profound impact on the nascent debate on the role and place of women in the traditional tribal Saudi society. She was also instrumental in promoting and founding numerous institutions and organisations that continue to work towards empowering women through skill development, education and leadership training programmes. King Faisal’s reign was significant in bringing women’s education to focus despite the

vociferous opposition from the conservative and traditionalist sections and religious leaders (Ramazani, 1985). The strongest opposition erupted in Qasim, where a school was forced to shut down and one scholar warned the people saying:

> You Muslims, beware of the dangers. Get united to go to the government and scholars to show them the truth and ask them to close these schools that teach modern material. The outside of these schools appears to be good but inside there is corruption and chaos. The schools will end up promoting unveiling and debauchery. If you do not act now before it is too late, you will regret it (Al-Washmi, 2009: 44 cited in Al-Rasheed, 2013).

While the opposition gradually subsided and the society started to accept the idea of educating their girls, the pace of growth has been slow. Mainly due to the efforts and advocacy of al-Saud members and intellectuals, girl's schools and colleges were opened in different provinces and people started to allow them to acquire modern education. While the ulema lost control of boy's education in the 1960s, they continued to wield influence over the girl's education until the reign of King Fahd. Thus, the curriculum and contents of girls education were determined by the religions leaders and hence within the Islamic framework (Prokop, 2003). For over four decades, a separate General Directorate for Girl's Education looked after girl schools and the situation continued until 2002 when it was merged with the Ministry of Education after a fire incident in a girl's school in Mecca.[3] The ending of a separate administrative arrangement for girl's education ended the exclusive control of the ulema.

Meanwhile, until the early 1970s the progress of the modern education system in general and girl's education in particular, had been slow mainly due to financial constraints and lack of expertise within the country. The oil boom paved way for the massive improvements in the educational facilities and infrastructure and the Ministry of Higher Education was formed in 1975 to deal with the higher education particularly in the science and technology fields. With the abundance of resources Saudi Arabia was able to hire talents from the neighbouring Arab countries and from other countries in South Asia and Southeast Asia. It was during this post-oil boom period one could notice

[3] In March 2002, 15 young girls died in a fire in an elementary girl's school in Mecca. It was reported in the press that the members of *mutawwa* (religious police) prevented the firemen to enter the school premises because students and teachers might not be wearing *hijab* (head scarf) and so it would be sinful for the firemen to approach them that added to the higher number of deaths. It led to criticism of their role from various sections, and subsequently, the Presidency was merged with the Ministry of Education leading to end of the exclusive domination of ulema on girl's education (Prokop, 2003; Hamdan, 2005).

significant infrastructural improvements in education. The Kuwait crisis marked a new beginning and along with the demands for socio-political reforms, Saudi Arabia witnessed demands for education reforms. As discussed earlier, unemployment among the native population, lack of specialised skills and inadequate quality training became major social roadblocks. They forced the monarchy to look for corrective steps and improve quality of education with an emphasis on human resource development. It was time the authorities recognised that the Kingdom cannot embark on economic growth without active participation of half the native population, that is, women. Therefore, measures were taken to improve access for women at all levels of education and it was deemed necessary to open higher education particularly professional courses and programmes for women (Al-Aqil, 2005; Al-Eisa, 2009; Al-Rasheed, 2013).

As part of the approach, considerable resources were invested into improving education infrastructure for girls and women, leading to increase in the number of schools, colleges, vocational institutions and university branches offering specialised courses for girls. For example, in 1967-68 there were only 100 girl's schools across the Kingdom, they reached nearly 1,600 by 1975-76 and crossed 6,500 by 1990-91. In 2000-01, there were more girl's schools than for boys, that is 13,726 as against 13,437 for boys (MoE, 2010). While the infrastructure for education witnessed expansion, women faced problems in the form of differential curriculum and lesser enrolment in science and technology education remained. For example, in 2008-09 women made up only two per cent of students in engineering colleges, while their representation in professional courses was nil. Their proportion was higher in pedagogy (87 per cent) and medicine (48 per cent) fields (MHE, 2010d).

In 2004, the monarchy introduced a new school curriculum which addressed some of the disparity between male and female education (Al-Eisa, 2009). The following year a new education policy was introduced that envisaged equal opportunities for both men and women in education. These measures addressed the problem of disparity in the curriculum and differences in the quality of education available to girls and boys. The new education policy sought to increase the participation of women in general and professional education (MoE, 2006). It stated that the state "values female education,

facilitates all necessary means for girls to seek education and provide opportunities for them to acquire any type of education that suits their nature and fits the national interest" (ibid). Emphasizing the importance of preserving local culture and tradition and the need to preserve the Islamic framework, it did not hamper improving infrastructure for female education. The monarchy did not want to antagonize the traditional and conservative sections while seeking to advance female education.

Through sustained efforts women's education, which was a taboo for some until the 1960s, became acceptable and widespread by the 1990s. As per Saudi estimates during the academic year 2013-14, girls outnumbered boys in school, college and university enrolment and their drop out ratio was lower across all levels. Since 2000, the number of schools for girls has surpassed the number of schools for boys. According to the Ministry of Education, in 2013 Saudi Arabia had a total of 35,397 schools of which 18,729 were girl's schools while 16,668 were boy's schools (MoE, 2013). Similarly, at the tertiary level, enrolment rate for girls (52.5 per cent) is higher than boys (49.5 per cent), while the pass ratio among boys is lower (11.8 per cent) than girls (25.2 per cent) (UIS, 2012). During 2012-13, of the total number of student enrolled in Saudi public schools, 2.6 million were boys while 2.7 million were girls.

The dropout ratio among boys at secondary to tertiary level is as high as 45-50 per cent while it is 35-40 per cent among girls. The ratio of literate women to men considerably increased from 83 in 1995 to 97 in 2013 (UNICEF, 2013). Similarly, the ratio of girls to boys in primary, secondary and higher education increased considerably. Special emphasis on improving educational opportunities and accessibility both at school and higher level has resulted in improvement in school education for girls. A similar trend can be witnessed at higher education level. As of 2013-14, nearly all universities have a women branch either within the same campus or a separate campus and almost all courses offered in these universities including engineering, business administration, aeronautics, nanotechnology etc are available to women (MoE, 2014).

According to the Ministry of Higher Education (merged with the MoE in January 2015), in 2008-09 women accounted for 56.6 per cent of the total number of students who graduated from all universities and colleges and 20 per cent of the students going

abroad (MHE, 2010d). The percentage has further improved in the past five years and 60 per cent of those who graduated in 2013-14 were women and technical and professional courses also witnessed increase in their enrolment. The number of diploma holders is greater among men mainly because women's training and technical institutions are lesser but compared to past it has witnessed improvements. Efforts to improve educational opportunities and condition of women are changing the situation.

One of the major factors that forced the government to improve female education was the recognition to increase their participation in work force and decrease dependency on expatriate labour. This opened up new avenues for women to step up their representation in the job market and since the late 1990s "women have been moving steadily into new areas of employment which were unacceptable a generation ago, such as advertising, broad casting and journalism" (Doumato, 1999: 569). The need for Saudisation of workforce and productive participation of the other half of population in economy opened new doors for women.

While schools and colleges for girls constantly increased, there has been a special focus to enhance their access to higher education. A new university for woman, Princess Nourah bint Abdulrahman University was founded in 2007 and its state-of-the-art campus with a capacity to house 50,000 students, faculty and staff was inaugurated in Riyadh in May 2011. For quite some time, women branches of existing universities were functioning while a co-educational university, King Abdullah University of Science and Technology, the only one of its kind, was inaugurated in 2009. This invited criticism from conservative sections due to mixing of genders and Saad al-Shithri, a senior clergy was removed from the powerful Council of Senior Ulema over his criticism of the co-educational university (Al-Mufadhali, 2009).

Along with the improvement in the education infrastructure within the country, the number of women going abroad for higher education also increased. Between 2005 when it was started and until 2014 King Abdullah's flagship foreign scholarship programme sent 200,000 Saudis for further studies abroad and until 2014-15 nearly 25 per cent of them were women (Molavi, 2015). In addition to other steps, the budget allocation for female education has been increasing; it reached parity with allocation for

male education in 1999-2000, and surpassed it by 2005-06. As of 2009-10, nearly 52 per cent of education budget was earmarked for female education. As a result, educational and training facilities for women improved and professional and vocational institutions started to admit girls in different courses including nursing, pharmacy, design etc. In 2014, there were more than 350 private and public vocational training institutions for girls with an enrolment of more than 38,000 students in as diverse fields as IT, business management, photography, textile and design, food and hygiene, electrical maintenance, jewellery design and beauty care (TVTC, 2014).

Women are pursuing studies and hence employment in newer areas including media studies, business and management, finance, law, science and engineering subjects leading to their foraying into newer areas in the job market. Female students are doing better in terms of performance in schools and universities and the improved educational conditions have impacted their status in other areas.

Economic Participation

Women are increasingly marking their presence in the economy, though their participation remains as low as 20 per cent, which is even lower than the average for the GCC States that stands at 43 per cent (G20, 2014). However, compared to the past, this is a substantial increase. Saudi women have come a long way when they were denied any scope for participation in the economy by the religious establishment and they no longer need to do business through a male agent. This was not easy. In 1985 when the government issued a notification allowing employment of women in some jobs other than teachers, Abdulaziz bin Baz—a popular and influential preacher and later on the Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia—issued a *fatwa* rejecting the idea of female participation in labour force and termed it a great sin that would open the doors of evil in the society (Bin Baz, 1985).

Three decades later, Saudi women have come a long way in actively involving themselves in the economy in many sectors and constitute nearly 18 per cent of the labour force. The importance lays not in the number of Saudi women engaged in economy but their ability to work in fields of their choice. While the numbers are important, the way economic participation can empower women in social, political and

other spheres cannot be underestimated. In the Saudi context, their increasing economic participation has significantly transformed the way women are treated in the society. It has made an impact in the socio-political sphere and had led to improvements in their status both within and outside the family (Doumato, 1999; Hamdan, 2005; Al-Rasheed, 2013).

The ratio of women in labour market has gradually increased; for example, in 1992 women constituted only 5.4 per cent of the native work force, it improved gradually to 14.4 per cent in 2010 (AlMunajjed, 2010b). The World Bank data on labour force reveals a similar picture; in 1990 women constituted nearly 14 per cent of the total work force (including expatriates) in the Saudi economy, and their share increased to 20 per cent in 2013 (World Bank, 2015). Saudi data shows that the gap between native and expatriate women engaged in the economy has gradually narrowed and as of 2014 Saudi women constituted 17.6 per cent of total manpower (native and expatriate) engaged in the economy (CDSI, 2014). In the past, while economic participation of women had remained low, the comparative participation of Saudi women was even lower; in the early 1990s nearly 14 per cent of total work force was women but only a small 5.4 per cent were Saudis. In 2013-14, this has changed substantially, if women made up of 20 per cent, Saudi women made up of 17.6 per cent of the total workforce in the country. Thus, the share of Saudi women active in the economy has tripled while proportion of women in the economy (including expatriates) has increased only marginally.

Though the increase in economic participation is not commensurate with their educational attainment, women’s participation in the economy and labour force has witnessed huge rise. They have breached traditional barriers to join professions that were traditionally denied to them. Previously, Saudi women were confined to jobs in fields like education and medicine that were acceptable socially as well as religiously but with changing circumstances they can be getting education as well as employment in newer fields. They are taking up jobs as cashier and sales women in supermarkets and departmental stores, security personnel at airports and other sensitive areas, banks, government offices, in the hospitality sector as receptionists and personal assistants, and as advisors and consultants in various sectors. Predominantly, women work within women-only environment as most often segregation is enforced in work places. Thus,

chances of intermingling of sexes are rare though many exceptions can be found particularly in retail business as well as in many higher educational institutions where women sections are located within the same campus but in separate buildings.

The opening of science, engineering and legal studies for women has led to increase in number of female professionals in the market. For example, in 2013 Bayan Mahmoud al-Zahran became the first Saudi women to be issued a license to practice law. She appeared as counsel for her client in the General Court in Jeddah in November 2013 and in January 2014 launched her own law firm exclusively for women clients in Jeddah (Khan, F., 2014). The same year, women were appointed as legal researchers, document controllers and in other administrative positions in the Court of Appeal across Saudi Arabia, again a first (*Arab News*, 2013b). In 2014 Hanadi al-Hindi became the first Saudi women to acquire license to fly planes and reportedly "has begun flying small and wide-bodied luxury planes belonging to a fleet from the Kingdom Holding Company (KHC)" (Khan, G. A., 2014). Many Saudi women scientists have been supported by grants and fellowships to pursue their research; Malak al-Nory in September 2012 became the first to be conferred the Ibn Khaldun Fellowship to pursue her research at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (Mallinson, 2014). The programme is supported by the King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals and Saudi Aramco to encourage Saudi female scientists and engineers to pursue higher research. Launched in 2012, the programme was subsequently expanded to accommodate more women scientists from different universities in the Kingdom. Saudi women scientists such as Hayat Sindi and Samera Ibrahim Islam have made a mark internationally through their work and were included in the top 20 Muslim women scientists by a UK-based online science magazine (*Arab News*, 2014b).

Female representation in the business sector has witnessed a sharp rise since 2008 when women were allowed to register their own commercial firms, and earlier they could register only through an authorised male agent. For example, as of 2013, 54,231 commercially registered businesses were owned by women as against 44,047 in 2012 (MCI, 2013). According to the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, the proportion of women ownership in private sector enterprises reached 4.3 per cent in 2013 while their investment in the Saudi market has seen a rise since 2008. The Ministry has taken

several measures to encourage and enhance women's participation in the commercial and business fields such as opening women service centres in Riyadh, Jeddah and Dammam and allowing women to be member of board of directors of private firms. However, despite these measures and encouragement the proportion of women investors in the Saudi market remains as low as 10 per cent as of 2014 (Al-Fawaz, 2014b). Business remains largely dominated by men despite some fissures created by women entrepreneurs and businesswomen, particularly in family owned businesses (Al-Dehailan, 2007).

Thus, educational attainment has led to an increase in the number of women in non-traditional professions such as journalists, scientists, engineers etc. Amélie Le Renard notes: this is a "... young generation of women, among whom a large proportion are educated and want to have their own activities beyond their families – whether they are informal activities, informal business, writing, shopping, or work ..." (Le Renard, 2008: 629).

The overall participation of women in the economy remains low and they face in-built systemic and customary constraints (Bahry, 1982). The unemployment rate among women stands at 34 per cent as against the national average of 8-10 per cent. As noted earlier only 17.6 per cent in the labour force are Saudi women. In 2013, World Bank estimates suggested that the proportion of unemployed female youth was as high as 55 per cent. Replacing expatriate workers has been driving force to encourage women participation in the economy. Furthermore, nationalisation of the labour force would check the outflow of capital in the form of remittances and address the problem of high unemployment among the native population, particularly the youth.

It was mainly during the reign of King Abdullah that special focus was laid on improving economic participation of women. Initiatives such as women industrial city, special female economic zones were taken and employment of women in certain retail sectors mainly related to sales of feminine consumer products was enforced. Industries which had a better scope for generating employment for women such as fashion industry, jewellery design, interior decoration and handicrafts were encouraged and supported. As part of this emphasis, the Saudi Industrial Property Authority launched a

project to develop an industrial city for women workers in Yanbu in early 2014 (Al-Helali and Al-Dehani, 2014). Another industrial city for women had been previously launched in Hofuf, in the Eastern Province, which was expected to employ nearly 5,000 women in various industries including garments and textile, pharmaceuticals and food-processing (*Arab News*, 2012).

The Kingdom has signed three major international conventions, namely ILO's Equal Remuneration Convention (1978), Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention (1978) and UN Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) (2000), that promote gender equality in job market (AlMunajjed, 2010b). Towards implementing its commitments, the Kingdom introduced many legislative measures including Saudi Labour Code that grants every citizen—regardless of gender—the right to work. Likewise, the Hadaf programme launched in 2000 seeks to improve economic participation of women by providing financial support and training (Royal Decree, 2000). These efforts yielded some result and as noted earlier led to improvement in their participation in the economy.

Saudi sociologist Mona AlMunajjed notes that the "... rising education level is a major factor in the increase of female participation in the labour force". She further elucidates, "This is not to say that simply getting a degree enables Saudi Arabia's females to join the labor market – unfortunately it does not" (AlMunajjed, 2010b: 3). This highlights the dichotomy of the economic system that poses challenge to Saudi women who aspire to become financially independent and contribute to the family's welfare and national progress. The system and local customs still do not accept the idea of active female participation in the economy or work outside the household. Statistics reveal that a large proportion of unemployed women are highly educated; according to the *Labour Force Survey 2014* of the Central Department of Statistics and Information, 69.9 per cent of unemployed Saudi women hold bachelor or higher degree. Though it has declined compared to 2007 when it was 78.3 per cent, this is higher than ratio of unemployed male university graduates which is 50 per cent (AlMunajjed, 2010b; CDSI, 2014).

The emphasis on Islamic culture and tradition prevent a large number of young Saudi students and professionals from finding employment even after acquiring professional

degrees and they express the need for evolving a better system to provide work opportunities for educated men and women (Quamar, 2013-14). Despite increasing female economic participation, social opposition to female work outside of household is strong. A large section of the population prefers women to take care of the household and child rearing. This is justified and rationalised on the basis of religious injunctions and local cultural ethos whereby men and women are supposed to be ‘partners’ and while the men have the duty to provide economic sustenance, women have the responsibility of raising children. This binary is said to be based on ‘law of nature’ which endows men with authority over women. The gendering process makes it clear that man and woman are different and women have to be guarded and controlled in order to “preserve the social system” created by God.

Some changes in this general perception, however, could be noticed and according to a study an increasing number of men and women are opening up to the idea of working women and “would like to see Saudi women as ministers, diplomats and senior religious scholars” (Al-Tamimi, 2014). Women are increasingly defying notions rooted in religion and local customs and this defiance is gradually impacting their condition. It is largely a product of economic compulsions and forces of globalisation, but is partly due to the willingness of the women to push social boundaries. Nouf Al Sadiq and Stefanie Hausheer (2014) note: “Globalisation and economic necessity, not necessarily liberal values, are propelling more Saudi women into work outside the home and catalyzing a shift in women’s role in society as well as in conceptions of proper behaviour”. Similarly Samar Fatany (2013a) notes the leadership role of individual women that inspires the new generation to take things in their own hands.

Notably, women’s participation in the economy and their increased educational achievements cannot be seen in isolation and should be understood within a wider perspective. These changes are affecting other aspects and are not confined to one area rather their impacts are percolating to bringing changes in the attitude and behaviour towards them and their condition in different spheres. The role of economic pressures in “upending traditional gender roles” is significant and “Women’s ability to make larger contribution to household income and the country’s economy has enhanced their status

and reduced the political, social, and ideological barriers they face" (Al Sadiq and Hausheer, 2014).

Family Status and Healthcare

An area of significance that has witnessed change during the past two decades is women's status within the family. As noted in Chapter Five, family remains the most important social unit and Saudis in general associate notions of identity, respect and dignity with family. These are rooted in the socio-political structures and culture and hence family identity becomes more important than individual identity (Samin, 2015). The important question is whether women have started to exert influence when it comes to the gender relationship within the family? In other words, have gender relations within family as a social unit changed?

Theoretically, the authority allocated to male as guardian or head of family remains exclusive and the patriarchal notion of male guardianship and authority over female has not changed. In practice, however, one could notice changes with women asserting their rights and aspirations. Improvement in their educational status and financial independence enabled them to exert more power within family. Demographic changes, particularly urbanisation and prevalence of nuclear families, contributed to greater say of women while education and economic participation provided with tools to make their choices. An urban, independent, educated and working woman is more likely to deal with a man in her family on equal terms than those who internalise the patriarchal norms due to lack of exposure to education, employment and freedom (UNDP, 2006). Studies by Saudi scholars suggest a shift in the husband-wife relationship moving away from a subordinate status to, if not equal then, to one of mutual interdependence (Al-Ghamdi, 1996; Almosaed, 2008). A professor of Saudi history in Riyadh related this to the changing social circumstances and globalisation and thereby forcing Saudi men to adjust to new realities (Quamar, 2014-15).

Scholars argue that in traditional family system women in the Arabian Peninsula enjoyed some freedom but the spread of Wahhabi ideology on the one hand and the forces of modernisation and oil-propelled economic growth on the other made them subservient to men (Altorki, 1977; Altorki and Cole, 1989; Katakura, 1977). Tradition

recognised a limited, protected and controlled status for the women making them in need of protection by men. Once the modern Saudi state was established and an oil-driven economy transformed the society, a skewed social development emerged whereby progress was made in certain aspects but simultaneously emphasizing conservatism on others. This was evident in the status and condition of women. Social anthropologist Madawi al-Rasheed (2013) articulates that the state-sponsored Wahhabi religious nationalism perpetuated the subordinate status of women and did not allow the idea of gender equality. Thus, the ideological constraints of the Saudi religious nationalism rooted in Wahhabi Islam dragged women behind when the society was witnessing modernization and economic development.

The situation started to change due to demographic and structural transitions, economic compulsions, forces of globalisation and women education. This change, more noticeable within the family, is manifested in ways such as marital choices, divorce trends, and increased wealth owned by women and a noticeable decrease in the size of families as well as decline in women's fertility rate. The most important aspect of this change is with respect to the power structure, whereby the hierarchical system of male superiority has been shaken. According to Saudi sociologist Nora Almosaed, "... the social and economical circumstances are shaping the value system especially those values surrounding power relations and household division of labour" (Almosaed, 2008: 63). She further elucidates: "Modern Saudi women are seeking education as means to finding employment, financial independence and decision making. Women's employment has been almost as important as women's education in changing the position and self-perception of women, and in altering the patriarchal gender contract" (ibid).

As a result, the Saudi women are asserting their right to choose and are refusing to accept male authority in matters such as marriage, child bearing, employment and so on. Traditionally marriages were predominantly arranged by families both for men and women, and in most cases they were endogamous but gradually the trend arranged marriages is on the decline as more Saudis, men and women, prefer to find life partners on their own. Studies suggest that the number of women who prefer to choose their life

partners is on the rise, especially in urban areas and the number of *tahjeer*[4] marriage is declining even in rural areas. The number of court cases involving *tahjeer* marriage has been on the rise in recent times as large number of women are refusing to enter into predetermined marriages with their male relatives (*Saudi Gazette*, 2014c). As a result, the Committee of Senior Ulema issued *fatwas* against such marriages thereby paving the way for family courts to annul *tahjeer* marriages if girls report their unwillingness. Studies also reveal that the proportion of female who are choosing their life partners on their own is on the rise (Jiffry, 2013). These indicate, women gaining some space, if not a decisive role, while making marital choices (Al-Khateeb, 2007).

In addition, as discussed in the preceding chapters, the average age of marriage for women has increased towards mid-twenties and fertility rate has declined which shows that overall women are taking decisions about these matters. There are various factors for the rising average age for marriage including educational aspirations, lack of financial stability and rising cost of marriages. Late marriage among women means less average age for bearing children per woman leading to a drop in fertility rate. Similarly, decisions regarding contraceptive usage are indicative of a degree of family planning which requires informed and willing participation from both partners indicating signs of female having a say in these family matters.

Similarly, there is a noticeable increase in the number of divorce cases where women are the initiating party. This can be seen as sign of them refusing to accept a subordinated status. Educated women tend to demand a better treatment and respect but men while wishing to marry educated women expect them to behave in traditional manner of subservience thereby increasing marital discords. According to a study the Kingdom witnessed more than 30,000 divorces during 2012, which stood at 27,000 in 2011 and 18,000 in 2010 (Alshayea, 2012; *Al-Eqtisadiah*, 2013). The number according to the Saudi Ministry of Justice reached nearly 34,000 in 2014. This meant that as of 2014 one in five marriages ended in divorce, which is one of the highest rates in the Gulf countries (Antonelli, 2015). Reasons for the dissolution of marriage filed by girls

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[4] A marriage agreement entered into by male guardian of a young girl with a male relative without consulting the girl. In most cases *tahjeer* marriages end up in a young girl married off to an older relative in exchange of large amount of *mahr*.

include not allowing them to continue their education or being forced into marriage (Fatany, 2013b).

Though not unique to Saudi Arabia, traditionally marriage has institutionalised male superiority. Scholars suggest that the condition of women within the institution of marriage is improving and Saudi sociologist Salwa al-Khateeb (2007) argues that traditionally a marital relationship was based on authority of men and subservience of women. Wives were expected to unconditionally 'obey' and 'respect' their husbands, and take care of children and home. This traditional understanding of marriage has been affected by women's education, acquisition of economic wealth through employment and their exposure to outside world. She further articulates that women demand better treatment and often do not accept their subservient status. Economic compulsions which result in women being allowed to take up jobs to add to the family income have led to changes in attitude towards women and their role in the family. When they are bread-winners, the family sees them differently. At the same time, increasing financial independence and assertion of rights have created frictions within the family leading to increase in the number of divorces (Baqader, 1993; Abduh, 2010).

Reflecting on the relationship between husband and wife Salwa al-Khateeb observes: "In traditional Saudi society relationships between men and women were essentially unequal. Men were dominant, their supremacy unquestioned, while women were subordinate and were expected to show great respect to their husbands" (Al-Khateeb, 2007: 93). Reasoning the compromises of male authority in family and marriage she articulates: "Female education and employment have improved the status of women within the family and given them more power in family decision-making, particularly in upper-middle and upper classes" (ibid: 98). As the number of working women increased, the role and importance of family in their life, has started to come down and although, the idea of women's emancipation remains limited in its reach and acceptability, family's engagement in women's life and life choices has decreased to some extent (Almosaed, 2008).

One could notice a familial tension over guardianship especially in the urban-based nuclear families. Traditionally among the kin group living in the same household, the

eldest male members mostly take the responsibility as guardian. This phenomenon is common to patriarchal societies in many developing countries, including the Arab world. Though Islam is seen the main reason behind prevalence of patriarchy in Arab societies, some attribute this to local culture that intertwines with religion (Nashat and Tucker, 1999; Moghadam, 2003; Badran, 2009; Mernissi, 2011). However, in the urban nuclear families, the situation is slightly changing as educated women demand equal status in a marriage or at least expect more caring and accommodative behaviour from husbands (Al-Khateeb, 2007). Formally the norm of male authority continues to remain unchallenged and the male guardianship is so entrenched that women are not allowed to travel, do business, pursue education or visit hospitals without a written permission from their male guardians (Al-Mukhtar, 2014).

Likewise, segregation of sexes is strictly followed in private and enforced in public. The idea of segregation is not unique to Saudi Arabia, as in it was followed in other Islamic and non-Islamic societies and still remains relevant to some traditional societies. What is unique in Saudi case is that it has become a norm and part of the value system despite modernization, economic progress, increased education, rapid urbanization and globalization.

Hence, it would be wrong to overestimate the extent of change in the status of women in family, mainly because the phenomenon is confined to upper middle-classes and upper classes in urban locations. Rural and interior areas continue to follow traditional norms and women are forced to live within the traditional confines of male authority (Quamar, 2014-15) and the authority of men within the family remains strong in social psychology. Increasing cases of divorce and broken families have given the conservatives to argue that the subordinated status of women in family is a “natural phenomenon” and tinkering with this leads to social problems (Abduh, 2010; Al-Omani, 2014).

An important area that has witnessed significant improvement is the healthcare facilities for women. It received early attention from the state and given the resources at disposal in the wake of the oil boom, they improved significantly. Earlier, most of the medical practitioners in female healthcare were expatriate women from Western and other Arab

and Muslim countries. With expansion in female education a large cadre of native female medical practitioners were trained and now contribute significantly to the overall healthcare facilities. Thus, a stable and self-sufficient healthcare system is emerging that fulfils the medical needs of Saudi women.

Saudi sociologist Mona AlMunajjed (2010b) notes that the advancement in women's healthcare can be attributed to their increased awareness due to education and economic participation. Families even in smaller cities and towns have started to understand the significance of female healthcare who are provided with excellent healthcare facilities close to their homes even in remote and far off locations. Resultantly, improvements in women's health and nutrition, and a reduction in infant mortality and fertility rates were witnessed at national level. For example, estimates suggest that 98 per cent of Saudi women received maternal healthcare while similar per cent of births were being attended by skilled health personnel, thereby contributing to a decline in mortality rates (World Health Organisation, 2014). Despite the stigma in conservative societies, the use of contraceptives is on the rise; for instance, only 21 per cent women used any form of contraceptive in 1996, it increased to 32 per cent in 2003 and according to some estimates might have reached 40 per cent as of 2010 (United Nations, 2012b). Some suggest that overall contraception use has been higher as people still find it difficult to admit usage of contraceptives which are sold across the counter (Al Sheeha, 2010). The declining trend in fertility rate indicate increased usage of contraception and has dropped from 6.5 in 1993 to 3.7 in 2004 and to 3.1 in 2010.

There are issues that continue to affect female health and healthcare. For example, chances of physical exercise for women are limited and the ulema continue to oppose introduction of physical education for girls in public schools. There are both societal norms and states practices that limit women's access to healthcare facilities. A Saudi woman is not allowed to be admitted in hospital without the presence or consent of male guardian, thus, restricting their access. Studies also suggest that obesity is a common problem among Saudis, more so among women because of restrictions on exercises, sports and other outdoor activities (Al-Nozha et al., 2005). Moreover, practices and customs such as early and endogamous marriages affect the maternal and child health. Saudi Arabia has a high occurrence of Cystic Fibrosis that primarily affects women due

to "the prevailing custom of marrying within families and relatives" (Tago, 2014). Proposals to introduce physical education for women or minimum age for marriage are blocked by ulema who consider them to be against the spirit of Islam (Al-Ghamdi, 2014).

Media and Civil Society

Media and civil society continue to face structural and systemic challenges in addressing the issues and concerns of the citizens and remain at a nascent stage. Some openings have been noticeable due to constant international scrutiny, they are largely state-controlled. Many women academics and columnists such as Hatoon al-Fassi, Samar Fatany, Thuraya Obaid, Amira Khasgari, Halima Muzaffar and others contribute regularly in the English and Arabic language dailies and periodicals published in the country. The number of women media professionals has increased and many work as reporters, news readers, photo journalists and anchors. *Al-Ekhbariya* news channel that was launched in 2004 was the first to appoint women as presenter and readers, while *Rotana* a prominent name in Saudi broadcast media had appointed a woman as editor-in-chief of its newly launched magazine in 2006. In February 2014, Somayya Jabarti became the first female to become the editor-in-chief of a Saudi daily, *Saudi Gazette* (Fatany, 2013a).

The media has provided an opening for female professionals and has given space for diverse opinions with respect to women and their role in the society. It created awareness about widening the scope for women professionals and their participation in public life. The government too has played some role and one of the major shifts in the debate over condition of women was noted after the third National Dialogue (2004) devoted to discussing condition and role of women.

Women's participation in traditional media notwithstanding, social media has provided a platform for them to voice their concerns. Their participation in social media such as *WhatsApp*, *Twitter*, *Facebook*, *Instagram*, *Pinterest* etc is substantial and according to a survey conducted in 2014 nearly 13 per cent of the social media users in Saudi Arabia were women (Perlov and Guzansky, 2014). Many women have used the social media to put across their views; for example, Hatoon Qadi who broadcasts satirical videos

through her channel *NoonAlniswa* via *YouTube* has gained popularity. Noted journalist Maha Akeel (2011) points that social media has provided a tool for Saudi women to participate in public debates and that they not only discuss issues concerning women but are involved in a variety of issues including politics, economy, literature and religion. She elaborates that due to restrictions and censorship in the traditional media women have increasingly embraced social media and used blogs and micro blogging sites to "express their opinion more freely." They have used social media to run campaigns such as *Women2Drive*[5] to press for women's rights.

The increased visibility of women and women's issues in the media should not be overestimated and a large section of the population remains hostile to the idea of giving more space to them and insist on 'women's nature' to deny them any public role (Sakr, 2008; Akeel, 2010). Naomi Sakr notes "that a quantitative increase in Saudi media content addressing women's status did widen the margins of debate" (Sakr, 2008: 403). Maha Akeel laments that despite a rise in number of female media professionals, they continue to "face social restrictions and hurdles" and that many of them are forced to leave work to devote time to their families after marriage (Akeel, 2010: 69-70). She also points out that there is hardly any department of media and communication in any of the female Saudi college or university.

Civil society functions slightly differently in the Kingdom and largely traditional charity organisations and emerging voluntary sectors are described as civil society (Montagu, 2010; Montagu, 2015). Within this limited space, some prominent women, especially from the higher echelons of the society, have been able to create a niche for themselves. One such woman is Nayla Attar who had been actively demanding the inclusion of women in the Shura Council and for allowing women to vote and contest in municipal election. She launched *Baladi* (*My Country*) campaign in 2011 when the authorities refused to allow women participating in the municipal elections. As the goal of the campaign is about to be realised in the December 2015 municipal elections, Attar together with many others continue to campaign for larger participation of women.

[5] Launched in 2011 by Manal al-Sharif, the *YouTube* campaign encouraged women to take to the wheel and post their videos online. The movement generated support as well as furore and eventually a crackdown by the authorities.

Others such as Samar Badawi, Alia Banaja, Reem Assad, Fatima Qurub, Samia Alamoudi have been engaged in various campaigns to create awareness about women's rights and call for justice and freedom for women. Female members of the royal family such as Adela bint Abdullah al-Saud, Hussa bint Salman al-Saud, Reema bint Bandar al-Saud, Maha bint Faisal al-Saud and others have been actively involved in civil society activities (Fatany, 2013a).

There are a number of philanthropic organisations that work towards empowering women through imparting skills and training towards attaining financial independence. One such organisation is *Al Nahda Philanthropic Society* that was founded by Sara al-Faisal—daughter of King Faisal—in 1962 and continues to work for educational and economic empowerment of women and to take forward the legacy of Queen Iffat, who was the inspiration behind starting modern education for girls (Al Nahda, n.d.). Many other individuals such as Samira Khashoggi, Muzaffar Adham, Suad Jaffali and Sultana Ali Reza have been actively working in philanthropic activities. Organisations such as Olayan Financing Company Women Network (OWN) established in 2012 are dedicated towards enhancing the participation of women in respective fields of economy.

There are a number of women's associations and organisations working in different fields. *Sayeda Khadija bint Khawilid Business Center* is one such organisation which is supported by the Ministry of Trade and Commerce to promote business and entrepreneurship among women. Several individual start-ups such as *Al-Faisaliah Women's Charitable Society* (Jeddah) are engaged in training and providing employment for women. On the other hand, are movements that have campaigned for greater political rights and space for women have run into trouble with the authorities. A movement for women's right to drive that was started by Wajeha al-Huwaider and Fawzia al-Uyyouni grew into *Association for Protection of Defence of Women's Rights* and has run into trouble as it crossed 'acceptable' limits of tolerance and the two activists were sentenced to ten months prison on different charges (Human Rights Watch, 2013).

Similarly, in 2013 two of the prominent voices of dissent Abdullah al-Hamid and Mohammad al-Qahtani were convicted of charges of providing inaccurate information

to foreign media and of founding and running a human rights organisation without authorisation. Both were imprisoned for 10 years while *Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association* (SCPRA) founded by them was disbanded (Amnesty International, 2014). This was because the SCPRA called for human rights and liberty beyond the 'unwritten limits' imposed from the top.

The issue of women's rights does evoke some debate in the media and civil society but their effectiveness is limited due to the nature of the state. Despite this, they do have some influence as articulated by Caroline Montagu: "... the NGOs, charitable sector, and association have been major agents for socio-political dialogue and social reforms, and provide an essential arena for discussion and dissent between the governing Al Sa'ud family and the people" (Montagu, 2010: 68). She further elaborates that if "the voluntary sector is traditionally seen as a key part of civil society, then Saudi Arabia has a thriving civil society, and as a major national force, the voluntary sector is an important driver for social reforms and modernization" (ibid).

Arts and Fashion

In a society that largely frowns upon the idea of any role and place for women in public life, it is interesting to note that some spheres have a dominant female presence. Despite facing discriminatory practices and restrictive social environment women have made their mark in the fields of arts, design and fashion. This could be due to the traditional nature of the society and an easy opening available for women and also because these are considered as 'feminine works.'

Saudi art scene has evolved from near negligible to what some commentators define as 'thriving' (Otterbeck, 2012) and many private art galleries in Jeddah, Riyadh and other cities have displayed works by women artists. One of the most prominent names in the contemporary Saudi art scene is a woman named Manal AlDowayan who did some groundbreaking work and exhibited her work all over the world including within the country in art studios such as *Alaan Artspace* (Riyadh) and *Hafez Gallery* (Jeddah) (Al-Dowayan, n.d.). Her works explore theme such as the impact of oil on people's life, and engages with other social issues. She has questioned social taboos regarding restrictions on women and one of her art exhibitions *Esmi–My Name* questioned the idea of not

mentioning women's names. Her works have been displayed in many cities across the world and attracted praise for her bold themes (Bouaissa, 2013). Haifa Mansour is a renowned film director whose work *Wajda* received critical acclaim world over and became the first official Saudi entry in the Academy Awards (better known as the Oscars) foreign language category. The film explores the restriction on physical education in Saudi girl's schools and makes a strong case (Lapin, 2013).

Many artists and galleries have made efforts to explore and underline the contribution of Saudi women artists across generations. Art historian Samia Khashoggi – co-founder of Jeddah-based *Saudiaat* established in 2005 – promotes Saudi female artists and has been a major force in discovering anonymous works by women from previous generation. In early 2015, she was the source behind an exhibition hosted by *Hafez Gallery* in Jeddah titled *Anonymous: Was a Woman* that focuses on representation of Saudi women in art (Manjal, 2015; Rao, 2015). In an interview shedding light on the concept she said "Women empowerment in our society is a subject I am passionate about" and the exhibition "explores the diversity in mediums and see how female artists have represented women in our society" (Manjal, 2015). There are many others such as Noura Bouzo, Sarah Abu Abdallah, Maha Malluh, Sarah Mohannah al-Abdali who have become prominent through their art works and are become known within and outside the Kingdom (Milner, 2012). The number of women writers too witnessed increase and literary figures like Thurayya Obaid, Fawziya Abu Khaled, Halima Muzaffar, Badria Albishr have become household names in the past ten years.

Fashion and design industry is another field where women have a dominant presence. From small start up selling designer goods in Olaya district of Riyadh and fashion streets of Jeddah most prominent names in fashion and design industry are dominated by women. Many have studied fashion design in neighbouring Bahrain and the UAE or in the US and UK and have returned to make a niche for themselves. The idea that the conservative Saudi society has a vibrant design and fashion industry looks amusing particularly when in public women inevitably wear *abaya*. However, the fashion industry is fast growing, has a predominant female presence and has thrived within the traditional notions. There have been efforts to organise women-only fashion shows and promote use of colourful *abaya* and *hijab* rather than the traditional black-and-white

dress-code imposed by the ulema. Some women have invested in rediscovering traditional female dresses from various parts of the Kingdom and along with her family, Hamida Alireza founded the *Mansujat Foundation* to "revive and preserve the traditional and ethnic designs and costumes" (Fatany, 2013a: 56).

These changes have brought the question of role and place of women in society to the fore and create debates and discussion but remains confined to not questioning the status quo. The art, fashion and design scene has acted as a way for Saudi women to express their creativity, and spread their wings in public life but remains constrained by customary practices and highlights the tension felt in the society due to the competing ideas of forces of reform and modernisation and voices for conservation. The newly-found energy in the art, fashion, literary and design scene remains confined to a few locations particularly in Jeddah and Riyadh and reflects deep-rooted constraints facing Saudi women.

Leadership Positions

Individual women have achieved leadership positions in many fields and contribute to the changing perception about them and their condition. Prominent women in various fields have achieved high levels of excellence and professional achievements that in a way is symbolic of the fissures appearing in constraining their lives. These women have challenged the society through individual achievements and have contributed towards widening the scope for their public role. In their limited ways they have acted as agents of change, challenged the widely held stereotypes and act as role models for the younger generations. Saudi women such as Norah al-Fayez (educational administration), Samia al-Amoudi (medicine), Lubna al-Olayan (finance), Sarah Al Ayed (business), Hatoon al-Fassi (academics and social work), Samar Fatany (journalism), Suhaila Zain al-Abideen (human rights) and many more have achieved remarkable success in their respective fields and have paved the way for the younger generations to follow their examples.

The monarchy recognises the significance of allowing women to climb the professional ladder without which a comprehensive and sustainable development cannot be achieved. It has, thus, appointed 30 women leaders in the *Majlis al-Shura* in 2013 and

has created scope for organisations such as chambers of commerce and National Dialogue centre to allow participation of women in national and regional deliberations on policy matters (Al-Ahmadi, 2011; Thompson, 2014; Thomson, 2015). Women have also contested and were elected in professional guilds. For example, in 2005 two women—Lama al-Suleiman and Nashwa Taher—were elected as member of Board of Directors (BoD) in the Jeddah Chamber of Commerce and Industry (JCCI). This was the first time women had contested any elections in Saudi Arabia. At the time the JCCI had 3,880 members out of which 100 were women, and the board comprised of 12 members. In the build up to elections, nobody expected the women to win as it was the first time women were allowed to contest and 17 women were in the race (*Asharq Al-Awsat*, 2005). Subsequently, women contested for the board in Mecca and Riyadh chambers, though they could not meet the success of JCCI (Mohammed, 2013).

The context of development model or a development oriented growth has provided space for women to excel in variety of fields. Political Scientist Hanan al-Ahmadi opines:

> ... Saudi Arabia is embracing a new strategic direction to recruit qualified women into positions of leadership at the top of the hierarchy in public and private sectors. Saudi women are slowly but definitely assuming high positions that include deputy minister, university president, Shura Council consultants, board members of Chambers of commerce and many other new and exciting positions... (Al-Ahmadi, 2011: 150).

Al-Ahmadi, however, also articulates the problem facing women in leadership positions due to inherent discriminatory system such as gender segregation and deep-rooted subordinated status of women. She opines that “despite their high qualification, job experience and full readiness to assume leadership roles in their organizations, women leaders in Saudi Arabia face several challenges that limit their effectiveness as leaders and prevent them from achieving their potential” (Al-Ahmadi, 2011: 165).

While women are achieving a degree of progress in professional life and leadership positions in various fields they continue to face problems that are reflective of their status in the society. Most of these issues are systemic and are manifested through the institutionalised restrictions and discriminations facing them on daily basis.

Restrictions and Discrimination

In spite of a degree of success, many areas continue to remain out of the purview of women and entrenched in the traditional patriarchal system, they are refusing to allow any role or space for women, even within a segregated context. These areas remain exclusive male prerogative and defy the urge for change. The monarchy considers them too sensitive to adopt policies that can alter the status quo or these areas are dominated by ulema who view the involvement of women as harbinger of social degeneration, chaos and evil. As a result, spheres such as politics, judiciary and sports are exclusive male domains and have not seen any change or modification and are viewed as being unsuitable for tough and masculine works because of their 'soft nature.'

Politics

Representation of women in politics in near negligible. In fact, until September 2013, when for the first time King Abdullah nominated 30 members, women representation in the *Majlis al-Shura* which was functional since 1993 was nil. Since 2009 a few women were appointed as advisors in various committees of the *Majlis al-Shura* but full membership had to wait until the sixth Shura council in 2013 (Trenwith, 2013). The situation should be located within the larger context. In a closed monarchical polity governing a largely traditional society even men hardly have any political rights and women, being subordinates as per law, political opening for them seemed a distant dream. Though the political system has evolved and has some inbuilt consultative mechanisms, the polity remains the domain of the al-Saud family where men reign and administer the state. There have been instances when prominent women such as the Princess Norah (sister of founder King Ibn Saud), Queen Iffat (wife of King Faisal) and Princess Adela (daughter of King Abdullah) have influenced policies but largely they are exceptions and most of the princesses have remained anonymous and till now none ever held an official position.

Despite the closed political system and near negligible scope for women's political participation, some have carved out spaces through their activism that have potential political ramifications. One of the most significant political acts of defiance of the existing order has been the campaign and struggle to lift the ban on driving. The first

organized protests occurred in September 1990 amidst the Kuwait Crisis when about 70 women including university professors, journalists, doctors and other professionals, defied the prevailing driving ban and drove their cars in downtown Riyadh. This rebellious action was partly the result of them noticing the presence of American women soldiers driving in combat uniforms in Humvees. It was “a symbolic act prompted by the heady atmosphere of liberalization and the presence of Western media and military personnel” (Dekmejian, 2003: 403). The protest enraged the conservative constituency who were already perturbed by the presence of ‘infidel’ American forces on the Saudi soil (Heghammer, 2010). In the crackdown that followed those who participated in the protest were dismissed from their jobs and were abused in public and big bill boards with their names depicting them as ‘deviant’ and ‘motivated by satan’ were put in many streets in Riyadh (Heath, 2014).

The issue of women driving, though discussed in public, never became a centre for political activism until 2007 when a group of women led by Wajeha al-Huwaider unsuccessfully petitioned King Abdullah to lift the ban. From time to time a number of women such as Manal al-Sharif, Lujain al-Hathloul, Eman al-Nafjan and others have called for lifting the ban. In the wake of Arab Spring, an online movement led by activist Manal al-Sharif began but soon lost esteem due to action taken by the authorities. While women continued to be denied the right to drive, one could notice a change in the discourse. For long, it was largely a religious discourse that prevented women from driving as many *fatwas* had been issued by ulema prohibiting female from driving (Ifta, n.d.). The discourse now had shifted to the social and economic aspects of driving ban and authorities argue that there is no formal ban rather they are not allowed because of social taboo (*Al-Arabiya*, 2007). Similarly there are suggestions that the ban has to be seen within the context of its economic impact, particularly on the transportation lobby that are owned by many influential citizens (Al-Masoud, 2014). The change of the discourse is critical given the religious nature of the society and the political influence of the ulema.

Driving rights is not the only focus of women activism, many have participated and achieved breakthrough in various areas including contesting election for professional guilds and participating in the petitions ‘fever’. Though petition movement began in

1991, shortly after the Kuwait crisis, the involvement of women had to wait for over a decade. In 2003 a number of women had signed *In Defence of the Nation* that demanded political reforms. During the run up to the second municipal elections held in September 2011 activists like Naila Attar campaigned for women's political rights and demanded that they should also be allowed to participate in the municipal elections. She launched a campaign *Baladi* and was joined by prominent women from across the Kingdom. They campaigned and showed up at voters registration centres and argued that if the government does not allow them the vote, they would conduct a parallel "women's municipal elections" (*Jadaliyya*, 2011; *BBC*, 2011). Eventually King Abdullah conceded their demands in 2013 and women took part as candidates and voters in the third municipal elections held in December 2015 and 20 women were elected from various municipal seats.

Despite these minor victories, other larger issues remains and political opening for women and conceding to their demands and rights remain negligible (Easton, 2014). Eleanor Abdella Doumato attributes this to the gender ideology of the ideal Islamic women that creates the image of a prototype Muslim woman and links it with the Islamic credentials of the state and society (Doumato, 1992: 33). According to her, the state acts as the protector of the 'traditional values' and 'Islamic morality' enjoining women with household and family responsibilities. In terms of Saudi Arabia's political culture, this remains the norm, especially in the case of women, despite decades of change in many other spheres.

Judiciary and Legal Issues

Judiciary is another area where representation of women remains negligible and their rights continue to be symbolic because of the domination of the ulema denying any space for women as in their view they lack psychological strength to judge complicated problems (Buys and Macuiba, 2012). As discussed in Chapter Eight some reform measures were initiated under King Abdullah to improve the functioning of the judiciary and bring professionalism. These reform measures are expected to improve the functioning of the judiciary and make it easier for women to consult the court to seek justice in case of violation of ascribed rights. Thus, women lawyers can argue cases in

family courts and all courts have women law researchers to help the judges arrive at more sensitive judgements pertaining to female complainants.

However, the system remains inadequate and even unsympathetic towards women, her personality, rights and demands. The law is inherently discriminatory towards women who are regarded as ‘minor’ by law. Till 2006, women were not allowed to register in law schools and until November 2013 they were not allowed to practice as attorney. The courts are largely manned by male graduates from religious universities and the *qadis* (judges) are trained in *shari'a* which bestows only a subordinate status to women. Additionally, the system places several obstructions upon her appearance in court even in cases where she has to file a complaint or has to testify against someone. They have to come along with a legal guardian, have to be wearing *abaya*, *hijab* and *niqab* and are to communicate or testify only through a male legal representative. The question of women *qadis* does not even arise (Buys and Macuiba, 2012).

Small steps have been taken; for example, since 2006 law faculties have been opened in women colleges and universities, thus many female law graduates joined law firms and courts in administrative and research positions. Similarly, since 2013 women have been allowed to practice law and in November 2013 for the first time a woman Bayan al-Mahmoud was issued a license to practice law, marking another breakthrough with respect to women's rights (Khan, F., 2014). They, however, do very little to address the issue of representation of women despite measures to increase the appointment of women support staff in the judiciary. In the words of Samar Fatany, “Women are struggling to fight discrimination in the courts because many judges and senior members of the *Ulama* are either unaware or indifferent to their suffering. Women have no voice in the council of senior scholars or as advisors to the grand mufti to address their needs and grievances” (Fatany, 2013a: 38-39).

Laws pertaining to guardianship remains the most severe constrains upon women and her daily routine. By law women are considered minors, hence they require permission of their legal guardians – only men – for all important decisions in their life including education, employment, marriage etc. Many women view guardianship as humiliating and bizarre as a mother, at times, is placed under the guardianship of her minor son

(Fatany, 2013a). There are practical problems. A woman could file a police complaint or register a case in the court only through her male legal guardian (even if minor) and there have been cases when the perpetrator of injustice is the male guardian against whom it is nearly impossible for the women to seek legal recourse.

The issue has come up for discussions in the media and academia and there have been international pressure. Many within Saudi Arabia such as social activist Wajeha al-Huwaider have articulated the need to abolish the guardianship system as it is discriminatory and violates human rights (Jawhar, 2009). In 2014, a petition signed by 25 Saudi women was submitted to the *Majlis al-Shura* calling for an end to the "absolute male guardianship" (Harbi, 2014). There were counter voices where some women have come out in support of the existing guardianship arrangement; for example, in August 2009 Rowdha Yusuf along with 15 other Saudi women launched a campaign "My Guardian knows What's Best for Me" and within two months they gathered more than 5,000 signatures in support (Zoepf, 2010). This move generated some media debate and many women bloggers came out with scathing criticism of the campaign and Eman al-Nafjan (2009) in her blog said "The aim of the campaign is to stand against women who are demanding to be treated as adults." While there is no unanimity, the guardianship law has become a most seriously contested issue among the Saudi women.

There are other legal issues pertaining to *shari'a*. The Islamic jurisprudence gives women the right to inherit and own property but they face problems and discriminations. Some of the legal cases highlight the challenges facing women when they knock the doors of the judiciary. In 2014, a woman filed a case demanding her right to choose her future husband against the wishes of her parents who wanted her to marry a man of their choice and she won the case. Similarly, a girl successfully filed a case against her abusive guardian who did not allow her to enrol in the university (Al-Fawaz, 2014a). Divorce cases filed by women and cases challenging *tahjeer* marriages are on the rise. Such incidents have resulted in the issuance of *fatwas* in favour of women. In the cases of sexual violence and harassment the law is inherently discriminatory and complaining women have to bring male witness to prove their charges. In many cases, women who were raped have been charged with adultery and

were punished (*BBC News*, 2007; Evans, 2015). Women witnesses are considered less reliable and in the eyes of law, testimony of two women is considered equal to one man (Eijk, 2010). The influence of religion plays an important in keeping the judiciary out of women's purview as according to *shari'a* women are too weak by nature to be fit for the role of judges and other judicial matters.

Sports

Women have remained a lesser mortal in world sports despite all efforts to end discriminatory practices (Lomasney, 2007). Sports is considered a masculine work that is too hard for 'physically weaker' females and it is understood that playing sports can lead to loss of 'feminity'. Saudi women, as per existing laws, cannot participate in sports and they are indeed even barred from entering into a stadium as spectators in professional sports. In one such instance in December 2014, a 20-year college girl was arrested for entering a stadium to watch a football match disguised as man (*Arab News*, 2014c). Physical education and sports are prohibited in public schools, colleges and universities for girls and the Committee of Senior Ulema (CSU) and Grand Mufti continue to stonewall proposals for the introduction of physical education as part of girl's school curriculum despite argument that lack of physical education affects their health. In June 2013, government allowed some private schools (that largely serves expatriate population) to have physical education for girls on the condition that they have proper sporting facilities. In May 2014, a proposal for introducing physical education in girl's schools attracted protests and in December local media reported that the School Sports Union—a government body in charge of developing sports in public schools—would not allow sports in girl's public schools (*Saudi Gazette*, 2014a).

There are, however, some notable exceptions. For example, One might also recall the intense debate leading up to the participation of girls in the official Saudi contingent for 2012 London Olympic both within and outside the Kingdom (Longman and Pilon, 2012; Wilson, 2012; Al-Rashid, 2012). Eventually, King Abdullah intervened and two female athletes – 800 meter-runner Sarah Attar and Judoka Wojdan Shaherkani – were nominated to the Saudi contingent. A few weeks earlier, another women Dalma Rushdi Malhas had participated in the Equestrian competition in 2012 Summer Olympics in Singapore but she could not participate in the Olympics due to injury. Similarly, in June

2013, the General Presidency of Youth Welfare granted licence to a women sports centre, a far cry from 2006 when a women basket ball club based in Jeddah had to be registered as commercial enterprise because the youth presidency refused to grant them license as a sports club (Toumi, 2013). The centre in the Eastern Province city of Khobar has a number of facilities including Judo, Yoga, basketball etc. Many were elated with the decision and argued that the opening of the new centre along with the decision to allow physical education for girls in private schools bodes well for women's sports. Lina al-Maeena who started the basket ball club *Jeddah United* continues to lead the team and points out that it is not just a matter of playing a sport but of defying the logic of prohibiting women sports which is considered a social taboo (*Mail Online*, 2014). Many others have used various means to promote sports such as football, basket ball, skating, cycling and judo among girls. They get support from the reformist sections but the conservatives continue to oppose any place for women in sports.

Domestic Violence, Polygamy and Other Issues

There are other restrictions and constraints that ail condition of women and affect personal and private lives of individuals, hence have a wider impact on their life and public participation. Problems such as domestic violence, polygamy, child marriage and segregation are widespread resulting from traditional perceptions, patriarchal customs and norms and religious restrictions. The legal status of women, dress code and gender segregation prescribed by the ulema, imposed by the state and endorsed by a large section of population makes the situation worse. The voices in favour of women's rights are largely subdued and are raised within the imposed limits of 'Islamic framework' and any discussion that goes against these regulations can invite retribution. Largely, the debate on women empowerment (*Tamkin al-Mara'*) does not touch upon these issues because they are regarded as 'Islamic' values and cannot be negotiated. There is some debate about changing the legal status so as to end the guardianship rule but it does not seem to evoke much support except among the reformist and modernist intellectuals (Fatany, 2013a).

In more than one ways, Saudi women lead an extraordinary life because of these restrictions and their fallouts. Despite widespread education and employment, gender norms and values have remained rooted in religion and tradition and are interpreted in

its puritanical form by the ulema. Thus, an educated, professional Saudi woman has to live with "ancient traditions" and "modern values" at the same time (Ramazani, 1985: 259). The discourse on gender is sharply divided between calls for more freedom for women and keeping the status quo of their limited public participation and segregation. Many rue the problems faced by the women and wish that things change for good, but at the same time do not want to challenge the ideals associated with official Islam (Quamar, 2014-15). Some of the features that exemplify the traditional ideals of nomadic dessert life are embed in the life and interpretations of religion and it is difficult to ascertain as to what drives such practices. Nevertheless, these have become so entrenched in the system that many cannot differentiate between faith and tradition. Kathrine Zoepf argues:

> Public separation of the sexes is a strongly distinctive feature of Saudi Arabia, making it perhaps a logical area for fierce debate. Since women have such a limited role in Saudi public life, however, it is somewhat surprising that it is their rights that have become a matter of open contention in a society that keeps most debate hidden (Zoepf, 2010: A7).

There are problems such as polygamy, child marriage and domestic violence that affect the lives of individual woman and their family status. Despite the changing marital trends, polygamy and marriage at young age remains a widespread problem. Though data on polygamous marriages are not easily available studies suggest a decline in the trend due to rising cost of maintaining families since the 1990s (Al-Khateeb, 2007; Yamani, M. Z., 2008). A study conducted in Riyadh in 1990 suggested that a dominant section of those surveyed agreed that polygamy has become 'less dominant' in the society. It further argued that polygamous marriages have "begun to decline as people become aware that they couldn't fulfil the stipulations related to it" (Hamdan, 1990: 165). According to the Ministry of Economy and Planning, in 2005, more than 16 per cent of married men in urban areas had more than one wife, while the rate was 26 per cent in rural areas (MoEP, 2005).

One could notice similar trends in child marriages. Rising age of marriage among girls indicate a decline in child marriages and the average age of marriage for girls has increased from late teens in the 1980s and 1990s to mid-twenties in the 2000s. Towards addressing the problem of child marriage in 2013 the government sought to set the minimum age for marriage at 18 for girls and 20 for boys but this was blocked by the

ulema and the Grand Mufti who issued a *fatwa* supporting the right of parents to marry their daughters once they achieve puberty. At the same time, the *fatwas* also endorsed that the consent of girls was necessary to make the contract marriage legal and Islamic (Al-Ghamdi, 2014).

Studies suggest some linkages between trend of late marriage, polygamy and high rate of divorce (Baqader, 1993; Al-Rumi and Al-Sayegh, 2004; Abduh, 2010). For example, women if unmarried until early-thirties accept to enter into polygamous marriages to avoid being termed as ‘spinster’ (*anusa* in Arabic), which is regarded as derogatory and not ‘respectable’. Similarly, many women who enter into polygamous marriages find it difficult to adjust and end up seeking divorce. A study conducted by researchers in the King Saud University in 2011 indicated that 55 per cent of women whose husband married a second time, sought divorce (Al-Jassem, 2011).

Gender segregation is enforced in all public and private spaces but many view this as an imposition of Wahhabi-Najdi ideals upon the entire population. As a result, women are not allowed to go out or travel even within the country without being accompanied by a male *mahram*, meaning husband, father, brother, son or other legal guardian. In urban areas women are mostly seen travelling in their vehicles accompanied by family driver, often expatriate and hence could not be a *mahram* but still is acceptable. This underlines the dichotomy in the imposition of gender segregation. Visibility of women in public – be it in supermarkets, *souqs* (traditional markets), on the road, offices, banks and public gardens and picnic and leisure spots, is normal but they are largely covered and do not intermingle with strangers. Largely in *abaya* (lose black gown) with *hijab* (head scarf) and *naqab* (face veil) but occasionally without *naqab* they rarely seen even without *hijab*. Their veiled presence is symbolic of the aspiration for freedom in a society that is obsessed with control and takes pride in its closed atmosphere. On the other hand, women are not just a victim of this social psychology but are part of it as well as many advocate the necessity of state control over women (Jawhar, 2009).

Domestic violence appears to be widespread though there are no reliable statistics to assess its extent and magnitude. From time to time media reports instances of domestic violence involving husband, father or legal guardian. The guardianship law prevents

women from reporting crimes in case of the absence or unwillingness of the legal guardian. Even more problematic are the situations where the legal guardian becomes the perpetrator of violence, discrimination or violator of their rights, whereby the law requires the guardian to report on behalf of the women. According to Maha al-Muneef, the founder and executive director of *National Family Safety Program* (NFSP), reporting of cases of child abuse and domestic violence have increased multiple times since 2005 when the NFSP was founded (Aziz, 2013). Muneef who served as advisor to the *Majlis al-Shura* helped the council draft a law against domestic violence and child abuse, which was later deliberated upon and passed in the council. Later, the Council of Ministers approved and passed a law in August 2013 against sexual abuse and domestic violence but media reports suggest that it has failed to curb violence against women (*Al-Arabiya*, 2014).

Most of these problems are largely rooted in interpretation of religious text and traditions and a result of the patriarchal social norms. Though changes are coming, it has been slow. One of the reasons for this has been the strong opposition from ulema in bringing any policy level initiative to address these issues. Largely, the ulema are against women empowerment and term it as *Taghrib*, that is, Westernisation and are against any public role for them because they view them to be against women's 'nature'. Any demand to change the guardianship law is stonewalled on the basis of the verse in Quran: *al-Rijal Qawwamun ala al-Nisa`* (Surah 4; Verse 34) which is translated as: "men are guardian over women." This verse is cited in Hanbali-Wahhabi traditions in the codification of the relationship between man and woman as per their natures and accordingly, God has enjoined upon men to guard, protect and control women. The idea is deeply engrained in the social structure, and has been internalised by women to such an extent that there have been instances when individual women and women organisations oppose any proposal to end the guardianship rule (Zoepf, 2010). Nesta Ramazani laments that "...in the prevailing climate of Islamisation, many of these women vigorously defend the restrictions imposed on them in the name of Islam and scuff at the "so-called freedoms" enjoyed by Western women" (Ramazani, 1985: 259).

Nevertheless, not everyone in the religious mould is fanatically opposed to any freedom or rights for women. For example, Sheikh Ahmed al-Ghamdi—an official of the

religious police in Mecca—is of the view that women need not use *naqab* (veil) and it is a matter of choice because Islam does not make it compulsory for women to cover their faces if they appear in public. His tweet on this point stirred a hornet's nest in the social media both in his support and against. Later, he appeared on TV with his wife beside him who was not wearing a face veil and reiterated his views that as per Islamic scriptures women are not required to veil in public. It outraged many and some even called for his removal from the committee and demanded punitive action. While some rejoiced at the idea that at least one member of the religious police felt that it is not necessary for a women to veil in public. The matter created online debate and forced the Grand Mufti to issue a statement saying that the views by Sheikh al-Ghamdi was personal and misleading and "may God Allah grant him the wisdom to retract his comments and repent" his views (Alosaimi, 2014).

Religious ideas and ulema (discussed in Chapter Seven) are regarded as the main obstacle in bringing about an improvement and change in the condition of women. There have been instances when the reformists and conservatives have openly engaged in angry public exchanges over women's issue. For example, in January 2004, Lubna Olayan a businesswoman and founder director of the Olayan Financing Company became the first women in Saudi history to be invited to give a keynote address at any major business forum. The occasion was Jeddah Economic Forum and a controversy arose when the religious police tried to disrupt the proceedings objecting to the 'improper' attire of the speaker (*Al-Hayat*, 2004; Akeel and Balkhair, 2004). The forum, however, went on smoothly and was widely reported in the media. Far from her dress, it was the content of her powerful speech that underlined gender equality that angered the *mutawwain* (Akeel and Balkhair, 2004). Perhaps, the sight of an independent, confident and unassuming woman in a public forum made the religious police felt threatened by her ideas resonating among the larger public. Similarly, during the third national dialogue meeting held in Medina in June 2004 heated exchanges were reported between women supporting more rights and those who argued that some "female participants are going too far in what they call liberalising the Saudi women. The so-called women liberals are trying to westernise the Saudi woman under the cover of modernisation" (Awkasho and Elhakeem, 2004). Further, there were reports of clashes between two

participants, Muhammad al-Arifi—head of the Teacher Training College in Riyadh and Wafa al-Rasheed—a former UNDP coordinator in Saudi Arabia (Al-Rakan, 2004). The intense debates during the third national dialogue on women's rights marked the divergences between the conservative and reformist views on the issue.

Tensions over the Gender Debate

In many ways the Saudi society is going through a transition and is at a stage where tensions between the old and new ideas, lifestyles and social structures have become glaring. This is visible in many areas—in the way people dress, penetration of technology in their lives and socialising norms of the youth. It is apparent in the contrast between the number of students enrolled in higher educational institutions, going abroad for education or joining religious universities. While some long for the return of traditional ways of life and wish things can be reversed, others demand greater changes to keep pace with other parts of the world. In many ways, the existing values remain strong while newer norms are becoming prevalent. A prominent foreign journalist who wished to remain anonymous and who spent a considerable time in the Kingdom describes this as "a combination of new and old" and articulated that Saudi Arabia is "modernising in spite of itself" (Quamar, 2014-15).

The question of equality between sexes evokes strong emotions from different sections of opinion makers. On the one hand, there are 'liberals' who demand more freedom for women, and end of public segregation of men and women, allowing women to drive and move alone without any male *mahram* accompanying them, as well as allowing them to go abroad alone. There are Islamists who have a contradictory view on all these issues and demand a limited role for women as home-makers, mothers and wives. In between these two, 'Islamo-liberal'[6] section that tries to have a balanced opinion on matters of gender equality. They insist on gender segregation and dress code but are comfortable with the idea that women can have some role beyond homemaker, based on the view that women in early Islam, such as Aiysha—the Prophet's wife and Fatima—the Prophet's daughter, had participated in battles and had some public role.

[6] The term "Islamo-Liberal" has been used by Stephane Lacroix in a different context, for details see Lacroix (2004).

In private discussions the youth argue that they feel left behind and aspire not just for better life but also for freedom to do as per their wishes (Quamar, 2014-15). Similarly, passion for keeping the 'Islamic' and 'traditional' characteristics of the society remains intact among a large section. What comes out is an uneasy co-existence of different ideas and ways of lives that cut-across regional, class and gender divides. It is best exemplified in condition of women and as argued by Nesta Ramazani (1985) Saudi women have to live a dual life at home and outside, symbolising the continuity of systematic discrimination and struggle for their rights.

It is not just the debates around issues that are sharply divided but the contestations among ideas and ideologies that provide the basis for these intense debates. The case of a young 20-year old girl who was arrested in December 2014 for watching a football match in a stadium disguised as a male can be an illustration for this tension between old and new. The girl, a resident of Mecca and a fan of popular football club *al-Shabab*, bought the ticket online, disguised herself in male attire and was able to gain entry through the security check in the Jawhara Stadium in Jeddah (interestingly though the stadium is named after a female member of the ruling al-Saud family, women are not allowed to watch professional games played there). During the club-level match she was spotted by a security officer and arrested for violating the prohibition on women attending sport events in stadium. It was later reported that the girl was released on bail and was made to sign a written apology for her action and promised not to repeat (*Saudi Gazette*, 2014b).

Discussions with Saudi youth indicate that the incident in Jeddah stadium is just the tip of the iceberg and women—young and old and savvy girls—are waiting in the wings to break the old barriers and embrace the new. Another very interesting aspect of the news was a reader's comment on *Saudi Gazette* when her release was reported. A reader named 'Allan' commented: "Almost 2015. A woman gets arrested for watching a soccer game. She should not have been arrested! She should never have apologized! It should be basic right that if she wants to go watch it, she and other women should be allowed ..." This comment received 137 likes in the few hours while also attracting two dislikes. Though a small number, the huge variation between likes and dislikes, gives an idea about the changing situation. In private discussions many wished that these regulations

be eased off but those with religious and traditional leanings were strongly critical of the girl's action and said that these things should be stopped otherwise they would lead to *fitna* in the society (Quamar, 2014-15).

Saudi social anthropologist and an ardent critic of the Saudi regime, Madawi al-Rasheed (2013) locates the problem with respect to the condition of women and the confrontation between old and new in the politico-historical context and observes:

> While recognising the patriarchal inclination embedded in existing religious tradition, cultural and social norms, shared in various degrees by all women in the Muslim world, Saudi women's marginalisation is a function of a historical process in which religion was turned into state religious nationalist ideology" (Al-Rasheed, 2013: 280).

She also argues that the Kingdom wishes to be seen as modernising, and hence, it allows some space for women to work and have some public role. Other Saudi scholars, particularly those who live in Saudi Arabia, disagree with her and argue that there is a genuine concern among the elites with regard to matching the aspiration of the new generation. Further, arguing that it is in response to these social pressures that the monarchy has started a reform process (Fatany, 2013a).

Social changes with respect to women's rights are small compared to the notions of gender equality as understood in liberal and modernist perspectives. Even minimal changes are largely driven by economic compulsions and advancement in education but the political subtext of struggle and tension between old and new, reformist-modernist and conservatives should not be lost in understanding the economic and social connotations of female participation in the society. These small changes have developed in such a contradictory fashion that they do not give any semblance of progress. For example, the developments with respect to women's achievements in different aspects of life have occurred in a completely gender segregated space. These contradictory ideals co-exist and at times give an impression of an uncomfortable co-existence whereby women can acquire education, work and take part in deliberation in the *Majlis al-Shura* but cannot drive, cannot socialise with males other than *mahram* relatives and have to live in the secluded female only spheres even in private. Nonetheless, this idea of segregated space has not prevented many women in achieving high degree of success in various fields.

Conclusion

Saudi society grapples with a tension that is unprecedented in its history. Its women face major problems and discriminatory practices and legal restrictions. At the same time, they continue to push for greater role in public life. In recent years, female university graduates have outnumbered males and their employment rate and participation in economic activities have increased. Women who have traditionally been allowed to work in education and medical professions can now be seen working in other sectors including hospitality, media, banking and government administration. The monarchy continues to work towards creating more opportunities for women and also encourages female entrepreneurs to start businesses. Fields such as law, engineering, business administration, that were until recently closed for women have been opened and have witnessed greater participation. Women have been appointed in important positions and nominated for deliberation in the Consultative Council. They participate in the national dialogues and write regularly in the media and also have a substantial presence in the new media. These changes have affected their social status resulting into assertion of their right within the family and emergence of sharp divisions in the gender debate. Despite these changes and progress in their condition, women continue to grapple with serious problems. Their legal status remains of subordinate to men and they are considered minor by law, hence they cannot take decisions about their lives in many aspects. Their representation in many fields including politics, judiciary and sports is abysmally low. Regressive practices such as domestic violence, child marriage, polygamy and segregation continue to be widespread. While part of the society has come to terms with the social reforms, a large section continues to look at the social and political life from the prism of tradition and religion creating fissures in a society that wishes to change without compromising on its culture and religion.

Chapter Seven

Role of Religion and Ulema

Religion is an important factor in all aspects of life in Saudi Arabia. While this may not be unusual, the high degree of religious component in the social and political spheres makes the situation extraordinary. Though there are many factors for this situation, the most important is the foundation of the Kingdom. It started with an alliance between a religious preacher, Muhammad bin Abdul Wahhab and a tribal chief, Muahmmad bin Saud in the mid-18th century, which has continued to provide legitimacy to the al-Saud rule. In the words of Joseph Schacht, "Islamic 'puritan' tendency, inherent in the nature of the Saudi Arabian state, was strengthened and made explicit and official when Saudi Arabia came to organize itself on contemporary lines" (Schacht, 1959: 137). In addition to the state, the society is guided by faith, playing an important role in shaping the local culture, values and norms, thus becoming a major determinant of social, political and economic structures. Religion is entrenched in the society to the extent that every aspect of life is expressed in Islamic terms and it is an important feature of public and private lives. People attach significance to religious observance and symbols and preachers and proselytisers are popular, respected and are influential. Ulema are an important component of socio-political life and wield significant influence because of their social contacts and alliance with the ruling family.

The state puts emphasis on observation and promotion of the religion and derives legitimacy from it on the basis of adherence to Wahhabi Islam. On the surface, it gives an impression of a typical religious society where life revolves around the belief system. In the words of Lebanese-French social scientist Ghassan Salamé, Islam "permeates the Saudis' daily life" (Salamé, 1987: 306). The education system depends on and derives heavily from Islam and there is a large network of institutions for dissemination of religious education. Nearly one-third of public school teaching is focussed on religion (Bahgat, 1999; Ochsenwald, 2001; Prokop, 2003). Judiciary depends on *shari'a* for all

civil and criminal matters and is predominantly served and managed by ulema (Aba-Namay, 1999; Vogel, 2000; Kèchichian, 2013). The same is true for politics whereby state derives legitimacy from Wahhabi Islam and the majority of opposition figures and organisations use the same Wahhabi interpretations to challenge and delegitimize al-Saud rule; for example, Juhayman al-Utaibi in 1979, Sahwa movement in the 1990s and al-Qaeda.

At the same time, as highlighted in previous chapters, the society has evolved and undergone a number of changes mainly due to introduction of modern education and technology, economic modernisation and demographic and structural changes. Resultantly people's perceptions of religion and its role in their everyday life have changed. For example, emphasis on religious education and insistence on religious justification for state policy have come down (Rugh, 2002; Prokop, 2003). Civil groups without any religious agenda are becoming popular (Montagu, 2010) while behaviour of youth is less shackled by religious interpretations (Murphy, 2013a). It is also evident in the changing status of women (Doumato, 1999) and decreasing intolerance of 'liberal' viewpoints in public discourses, what many Saudis describe as 'Western influence' and 'Westernisation' (Al-Ahmadi, 2011). Increasing appetite for and interest in the so called 'non-Islamic' activities such as literature, arts, music, films, television series etc are indicative of the changes (Otterbeck, 2012; Quamar 2014-15). This has affected the status of ulema and their role in public life and partially their influence has started to come down due to changing perception of people, especially among the youth. Their credibility has been undermined due to several factors, including a growing perception of their unbridled support to and justification for all actions of the ruling family (Bligh, 1985; Marines, 2001). At the same time, their political influence and institutionalised role in the system has been compromised due to reform measures undertaken in the areas of education, judiciary and administration to the extent that some argue that the Wahhabi ulema have become subordinated to the al-Saud family (Al-Rasheed, 1998; Stenslie, 2012).

This process of change in the attitude towards religion can be understood from a conceptual viewpoint of cultural change. Cultures are not constant and are built over centuries and are passed through and followed by generations. It is not a constant set of

codified attitude and behaviour that immortalise but is variable and changes with time and space (Ellwood, 1918; Parsons, 1951). Anthropologist Gary Ferraro observes, "...for there are no cultures that remain completely static year after year" and that "anthropological account of the culture....is a type of snapshot view of one particular time" (Ferraro, 1998: 25). Culture denotes the inherent and distinct elements of a society and signifies the collective and shared experiences of the way people live, communicate and express. It can be understood as a "complex whole" of the social traditions (Tylor, 1871: 1). In anthropology, it is defined as "integrated system of learned behaviour pattern which are characteristics of the members of a society and which are not the result of biological inheritance" (Hoebel and Frost, 1976: 6). It is a 'continuous' and 'cumulative' reservoir of shared experiences that are transmitted from generation to generation. It is continuous because it transcends generations, and cumulative because every generation contributes to it.

As part of culture, religious attitude and practices undergo change and are impacted by changes in values and norms. Simultaneously, faith and belief systems continue to define and shape norms and values in a given society. Norms and values are standards for attitude and behaviour that guide the desirability and acceptability of individual and collective actions and categorise them as good or bad (Kluckhohn, 1951; Bicchieri, 2006). Thus, religion and its links with culture, values and norms are specific to local contexts affecting religious practices and weaving a different narrative when it comes to lived experiences of a religion in different times and places. In this context, what is regarded as 'Islamic' and 'non-Islamic' in Saudi context may be different in other parts of the world. Similarly, what was regarded as 'non-Islamic' in Saudi Arabia in the past has become acceptable in the present such as photography, television, railways etc.

Islam remains an important factor in Saudi social life and ulema continue to hold a major influence but some shifts are visible in terms of the changing perception of religion and decline in the influence of ulema. This chapter examines the role of religion and ulema in the changing social circumstances. It has two objectives: a) to understand the changes with regard to religion and ulema at the social level, and b) to situate the role of ulema in promoting or hindering the reform process. The chapter is divided into four sections; the first discusses the importance of religion and ulema locating their

reach in the society, while the second examines reform initiatives that are related to religious realms and their impacts. In the third section the changing perception about religion, especially among the youth has been analysed. The fourth section evaluates the strong but decreasing influence of ulema. It concludes that despite the shifts in various aspects of social life and its impact on the perception of religion and role of ulema, their influence is a major impediment to any change in Saudi society.

Importance of Religion and Ulema

There is a consensus among scholars that religion and the religious establishment play a very important role in the lives of Saudis (Lipsky, 1959; Nevo, 1998; Hamza, 2002; Bradley, 2006; Al-Rasheed, 2006; Niblock, 2006; Alshamsi, 2011; House, 2012). Joseph Nevo (1998) suggests that the individual and collective lives of people in Saudi Arabia are moulded by religion, particularly the Wahhabi version and it plays a significant role in the formation of the Saudi national identity. Anne Rathbone Bradley (2006) argues that the Saudi social arena is largely controlled by the state and religion, that is, people's life and the interactions between various social institutions are influenced and directed by them. She further contends that the monarchy plays the role of an interfering state and the ulema keep the cultural realm under control within a specific set of rules on the basis of faith and its Wahhabi interpretations (Bradley, 2006).

This significance of Islam is best explained by history of the geographical landmass that constitute modern-day Saudi Arabia and the political evolution of the Saudi state. Firstly, Islam originated in the Arabian Peninsula in the 7th century and the region remained under Islamic rule since. It houses Islam's holiest sites—Mecca and Medina—and is the seat of the faith. Hajj, the annual pilgrimage to Mecca, one of the five pillars of the faith has continued uninterruptedly since the advent of Islam seeing huge congregation of Muslims from all over the world. The city remained the centre of Islamic world despite not being the political headquarter of Muslim empires at any point in time and continues to be so (Sardar 2014). It is not only the cities of Mecca and Medina but the entire Peninsula that is considered as birthplace of Islam and thus Holy and this makes the society overtly conscious of its Islamic identity.

Islam as a set of faith and culture has been followed in everyday life and in individual and collective interactions. It moulded the traditions and customs and became part of social values and norms. This created a situation whereby individuals expressed themselves in terms of Islam and it became one of the mainstays in the society. Despite its historical significance and predominance, Islam was not the only variable that shaped the society. Local customs and traditions pre-dating Islam and interactions with the outside world have impacted the cultural milieu. In fact, interactions with the outside world have significantly contributed in shaping the local culture even before the advent of globalisation mainly because of Haj and trade links (Alhujelan, 2008; Umar, 1985; and Shahin, 1997).

Secondly, the overt identification with Islam can be understood in terms of the political evolution of the modern Kingdom. Saudi Arabia came into being due to an alliance between a local tribal chief and a religious preacher, and it is on this basis that the ideological legitimacy of the Saudi state is derived. According to Tim Niblock, "In Saudi case, the ideology takes the form of a religious-based perception of how the society should be organized. The monarchy has always projected itself as protector of the Islamic faith, promoting the implementation of Islamic practices in the Kingdom …" (Niblock, 2006: 8). The state not just identifies and acquires legitimacy from religion but promotes its implementation. For example, the preface in the 1992 Basic Law, which was the codification of the existing order, identifies promotion of Wahhabi mission as the state principle, states: "The reform mission (that is Wahhabism), upon which the Saudi state was founded, represents the main core of the government. This mission is based on the realization of Islamic rules, implementation of Islamic law (*shari'a*), and enjoining good and forbidding evil ...." (Basic Law, 1992).

At many junctures, however, the ideological legitimacy associated with Wahhabi Islam has been challenged by individuals and groups who questioned the commitment of the al-Saud. For example, the Ikwhan revolt in the 1920s, the Kaaba siege in 1979, the Sahwa challenge during Kuwait crisis and the subsequent rise of al-Qaeda. These incidents forced the rulers to take steps to reinforce their devotion to the cause of Wahhabi Islam and concede more space to the ulema. In the process, religion and

religious establishment gained strength both in the political structure and in the social realm.

Religion in Social Sphere

While the above discussion may explain as to why religion is so significantly associated with people's daily life, one needs to understand the structures that facilitate the process, particularly in the social arena. One of the most important institutions that make the role of religion and ulema significant in Muslim societies is *ifta*—the practice of seeking and issuing religious advice on issues pertaining to everyday life. There are a number of intricacies attached to issuing a *fatwa* which are generally regarded as non-binding but the institutionalisation of the process of *ifta* gave the Saudi ulema a strong say in the social life (Alhargan, 2012). In turn, the role of state became important as it was necessary to follow the opinion of religious leaders who are part of the state structure. Thus, the whole process of issuing *fatwa* gave both the ulema and the state an unprecedented power perpetuating the influence of Wahhabi Islam.

It will be useful to understand how the system of issuance of *fatwa* works in Saudi Arabia. *Ifta* can be categorised into two types; one where an individual seeks *fatwa* on personal matters that does not has any bearing on public life. For example, people seek opinion about circumstances in which an individual is allowed to skip/modify mandatory ritual prayers or fasting during the month of Ramadan. Sometimes, an individual seeks opinion on methods of ablution (mandatory washing before prayers) and so on. The other type being what can be termed as *fatwa* that affects public life such as whether women should be allowed to work outside their home or should be allowed to drive. In 2005, King Abdullah ordered that the second type of *fatwa* can only be issued by the Committee of Senior Ulema (*Hai'a Kibar al-Ulama*; CSU) and are binding while the first type can be issued by local clerics upon an individual's request (Boucek, 2010). This has been seen as curbing the influence of ulema as discussed later in this chapter. While public life may have come under state's regulation affecting the religious domain, the social life remains under the influence of the clergy due to the organic links between the institution of *ifta* and local customs that emphasises on seeking religious advice on everyday issues.

Another important institution which is linked to *ifta* and hence contributes in enhancing the role of religion in social life is mosque. The centrality of mosques in Muslim societies in general and Saudi Arabia in particular is self evident (Zaman, 2013). It provides the opportunity for daily congregation, which works towards engraining the significance of faith in individual and collective life. In Saudi case, the Imams (prayer leaders) and preachers do not have much political influence because they are appointed and paid by the government and hence are subservient to the state, but they certainly exert substantial influence so far as social sphere is concerned. People consult local Imams and preachers and seek their opinion if they face problem related to myriad issues of daily life. For example, if somebody has a property dispute, Imams are consulted in resolving the matter based on *shari'a* provisions. Similarly, if one faces a marital discord, the families consult the local Imam or a local Mufti (jurist) to find provisions to resolve the problem between the spouses. Mosques also provide a space for socialisation and discussion. Although the state controls the mosques and even the Friday sermons are regulated for their political content, it allows a degree of autonomy in matters related to social sphere. Issues such as the role of religion, moral behaviour, social responsibility of individuals and collective life, problems in the Islamic world and role of women in the society, to mention a few, come up for discussion both in individual talks and in sermons by Imams and preachers (Quamar 2014-15). Thus, mosques play a significant role in perpetuating the significance of religion.

The Saudi monarchy also effectively uses mosque as a tool to extend political authority and mobilise support for the regime. Friday sermons provide an important instrument for the state to directly engage with the public. On important occasions the sermons are used to declare policy decisions or communicate government's stand on new developments. For example, after a spate of attacks inside the Kingdom in late 2014 which was claimed by the Islamic State (also known as Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), Islamic State of Iraq and Levant (ISIL) and by its Arabic acronym Da'esh), the sermon on 9 January 2015 declared the Islamic State as a group of 'misguided' individuals and invoked Quranic verses and *hadith* (prophetic sayings) to equate the

Islamic State with Kharijites[1] who should be dealt with strongly and destroyed before they destroy the Holy land of Islam (Quamar 2014-15). Similarly, the sermon on 23 January 2015, the day of King Abdullah's death, declared the ascendance of Salman as King arguing that the *ahl al-hal wa al-aqd* (people with binding authority),[2] that is, the political, cultural and religious elites have paid allegiance to Salman (ibid). It urged all Saudi nationals to pay their allegiance to the new King. Though not everyone would be convinced through these sermons but it provides a powerful tool to use mosque as an institution to gain support from the public.

In addition, in the Gulf societies local *majlis* (congregation) too contributes to the continued significance of religion. It serves as an instrument to extend political influence as discussed in Chapter Three. Most of the prominent members of family, clan, tribe, popular preachers, local merchants, businessmen, members of local sports and literary clubs, guilds of professionals and so on usually organise weekly meetings for people who form their support base. This is true for men as well as women and prominent women including princesses have been known to organise *majalis* (pl. *majlis*) for women. Al-Saud women have increasingly started to engage with the larger public (without appearing to be intermixing with men) and involve in social issues (especially related to women), thus, gaining popularity and influence within the family and larger public (Stenslie 2011). *Majalis* are more often open forums where people discuss local issues concerning family, personal problems and issues related to public affairs. In these informal meetings, religious scholars are inevitably consulted in resolving problem thereby contributing to the entrenchment of Islam. The size and significance of these *majalis* depend on the individual's socio-political influence.

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[1] During the early years of dispute within the Islamic community, especially during the rule of Caliph Ali, three groups emerged. One that was supporters of Aisha and previous Caliphs (later recognised as Ahl al-Sunna or Sunni) and second who supported Ali (later recognised as Shia) and a third group who declared the two warring groups as having digressed from Islam terming them to be non-Islamic. In return they were termed as Kharijites, meaning those who stepped out of the Islamic fold, being the smallest they either lived in secrecy or migrated from the Arabian Peninsula to find solace (Kenney, 2006).

[2] The term has its origins in the ideas of medieval Islamic theologian Ibn Taimiyyah who argued that it is the duty and responsibility of the people who can resolve disputes (*al-Hal*) and keep the community together (*al-Aqd*) (largely understood as jurists and theologians) to choose the ruler/caliph. The doctrine was adopted by many Muslim Empires but largely the practice remained a mere formality (Al-Salahat, 2006).

That apart local *sheikhs* (preachers) also organise weekly or bi-monthly religious *majlis* that help in extending their popularity and perpetuates the role of religion (Quamar 2014-15). Historically, such religious congregations used to be autonomous and were free from state intervention and enjoyed freedom to criticise the ruler. This served as a kind of informal check on the regime as it was not possible to regulate such meetings and *sheikhs* were largely financially independent of the rulers (Shahin, 1997). In contemporary Saudi Arabia, this is not the case as preachers are largely dependent on the state for financial largesse, thus avoid criticisms of the state, the ruling family and the ulema aligned with it. Moreover, the religious establishment regulates all religious congregations and no *majlis* can be organised without written permission (MoIA, 2001). It is argued that such freedom would give a freehand to extremists to proselytise their views and lead to discord and violence.

Other social institutions such as family, marriage, customs and rituals, ethics and morality and festivals work towards emphasising on and exerting the importance of Islam and ulema. A few examples would be useful. When a child is born, it is emphasised that he/she should be given an Islamic name and many a times local Imams or preachers are consulted. The prayer call (*adhan*) is recited in the ears of a newborn to emphasise that he/she is born in a Muslim family. A male child is ritually circumcised as part of religious doctrine following Abrahamic tradition (a Jewish tradition, it was adopted in Islam at the time of Prophet Muhammad). Children are taught the necessity and importance of ritual prayers and fasting and other Islamic practices to make them aware of their Islamic identity. The socialisation of a child happens in a manner that his/her Islamic identity is emphasised, thus, making the individual conscious of the Islamic heritage. Not to suggest that these institutions are not present in other Muslim or non-Muslim societies, but it underlines the ways in which religion is made a part of individual's psyche and social life.

In contemporary Saudi Arabia, the education system, both traditional and modern, helps perpetuate and emphasise the significance of Islam in both private and public spheres. Initiation of pupil into religion begins in the family but it is the schools and teachers that make a major impact in enhancing its significance. School curricula continue to have a heavy dose of Islam, and despite reform measures, unpleasant remarks about 'others'

including Christians, Jews, Shias and even non-Wahhabi Sunni groups have not been completely removed (Shea, 2006). Measures to reduce the control of ulema in education have been taken but the school system is largely managed by those graduating from Islamic universities, thus, undermining the effectiveness of reforms and leading to poor quality of school education (Bahgat, 1999; Bosbait and Wilson, 2005). The modern education system has a considerable religious content and there are schools for Islamic learning and Quran recitation that attract significant number of students, especially from economically weaker backgrounds. A large proportion of school graduates study in Islamic universities and are employed in various branches of the government, while others choose to either go to teacher's training colleges and other professional training institutions (Ochsenwald, 2001; Prokop, 2003). The education system produces a substantial number of religious graduates as well as those with a high degree of exposure to religion and religious subjects. In the process, the role of religion in the social life becomes important as students with a high dose of religion identify with Islam more than anything else, particularly with respect to issues such as women's rights and other social institutions.

Institutionalised Role of Ulema

Ifta, mosque, *majlis*, family and other means of socialisation to some extent explain how Islam and Islamic ideas are emphasised in the social life and how religion permeates the everyday life of people but to understand how ulema exert influence in the society it is necessary to map the structure, divisions and trends within the Saudi religious establishment. Broadly the ulema can be classified into two categories; those who are aligned with the state and are predominantly Wahhabi (hereafter referred to as establishment ulema) and those who are independent or are in opposition and have various ideological leanings including that of Wahhabi, Shia, Sufi and Sahwi orientations (hereafter referred to as independent ulema). It is not always easy to draw a clear line between 'establishment' and 'independent' because individual ulema at times have been co-opted by the state and rehabilitated as part of the state structure, and thus becoming a part of the establishment ulema. On occasions, religious leaders fall out of favour of the state and are sidelined, and become part of independent ulema. This reflects the nature of the relationship between the al-Saud and ulema that Stig Stenslie

(2012) calls “symbiotic, yet asymmetric.” However, the ulema as an institution have a role in the political system as an ally of the ruling family as well as a counter balance. Establishment ulema have been allowed to have their own power-base within the framework of the political system and they advise the King and the government and help shape public opinion in al-Saud’s favour, thus contributing to its legitimacy.

Within the establishment ulema there is some hierarchy and ulema belonging to the al-Shaikh family, the descendants of 18th century preacher Muhammad bin Abdul Wahhab, are dominant. Members of al-Shaikh are close allies of al-Saud and are respected for their religious knowledge and piety. They hold prominent positions in the government, Islamic universities, judiciary and religious bureaucracy and thus, possess considerable political clout. In that respect, the al-Shaikh can be considered as the first family of religious elite in a society where family identity forms the root of social and political structures. Traditionally, al-Saud and al-Shaikh have strengthened their alliance through inter-marriages and the practice continued in modern times. One of the most prominent examples is King Faisal, whose mother, Tarfah bint Abdullah, belonged to the al-Shaikh family (Kéchichian, 2001). Scholars suggest that the relationship between al-Saud and al-Shaikh is based on co-operation and respect for each other’s domain of influence (Piscatory, 1983; Kéchichian, 1986) and is mutually interdependent in nature (Marines, 2001). A number of studies, however, suggest that the influence of the al-Shaikh family has declined as al-Saud have gradually appropriated powers and made their allies including the al-Shaikh subservient (Layish, 1984; Al-Yassini, 1985; Bligh, 1985; Stenslie, 2012).

In addition to the al-Shaikh family, the establishment ulema include other offices and institutions. The most important of the religious offices is that of the Grand Mufti (*al-Mufti al-Aam*) who is appointed by the King and is considered to be the most learned, popular and influential of Saudi ulema. The Mufti is ex-officio chair of the *Hai’a Kibar al-Ulema* (Committee of Senior Ulema)—the highest religious body in the Kingdom and as its head he also presides over its research and edicts wing, *al-Ri’asa al-Amma li al-Buhooth al-Ilmiyya wa al-Ifta* (General Presidency for Scholarly Research and Ifta). Currently, Abdulaziz bin Abdullah bin Muhammad al-Shaikh is the Grand Mufti who took over from Abdulaziz bin Abdullah bin Baz (was popularly known as Sheikh Bin

Baz) in 1999 after the latter's demise. The office was created in 1953 by Ibn Saud months before his death, and a prominent member of al-Shaikh family Muhammad bin Ibrahim al-Shaikh was appointed as Grand Mufti. He served till his death in 1969. King Faisal in his effort to bring administrative and institutional changes abolished the office and instead established a Ministry of Justice in 1971. Later, King Fahd in his manoeuvres to deal with the unstable political situation in the aftermath of the Kuwait Crisis appointed an extremely popular Sheikh Bin Baz as the Grand Mufti, thus, restoring the office in 1993. The Grand Mufti is the most powerful religious figure in the Kingdom advising the ruler on religious aspect of government policies and decisions and in turn moulding the public opinion in favour of the al-Saud (Marines, 2001; Stenslie, 2012).

The second most important office among the establishment ulema is that of Imam of *al-Masjid al-Haram* that houses the Kaaba, the holiest site in Islamic world. The office is significant both for the domestic and the global Muslim audience because of the significance associated with Kaaba. Since Saudi Arabia uses Islam as a tool in its foreign policy and emphasises its Islamic identity to claim leadership in Sunni Muslim world, the role of Imam of Kaaba gains importance. Though politically not as powerful as Grand Mufti, it is a sensitive position. Imam of Kaaba is appointed by the King and presides over the General Presidency of Two Holy Mosques (*al-Ri'asa al-Amma li Shi`un al-Masjid al-Haram wa al-Masjid al-Nabawi*) that manages the affairs of the Kaaba and *Masjid al-Haram* in Mecca and the Prophet's Mosque in Medina.

In addition to these two offices, there are government bodies, ministries, universities and committees that are predominantly the domain of establishment ulema. A powerful body is the Committee of Senior Ulema (CSU) that was established by King Faisal in 1971. The members of the CSU are appointed by the King for a four year term in consultation with the Grand Mufti. The committee has immense influence on policy matters and shares a cordial relationship with the government as it provides the religious-legal cushion, while in return it is recognised as the religious authority with immense power and its members are arguably the most influential individuals of the Saudi religious elite (Stenslie, 2012). As of 2015, the CSU consisted of 20 members, who were appointed in January 2013 (Royal Decree, 2013). As part of his reforms

measures, when the committee was reconstituted in 2009, King Abdullah had appointed ulema belonging to non-Hanbali schools – Maliki, Shafi`i and Hanafi – (Wahhabi ulema follow Hanbali school) to make it more representative (Boucek, 2010). This was the first time non-Hanbali ulema were appointed in the powerful religious body and is recognised as an important reform step by Abdullah.

There has been only one instance when a member of the CSU was dismissed. In 2009, King Abdullah removed Saad al-Shithri from the committee for his public criticism of the government for gender mixing in the newly inaugurated King Abdullah University of Science and Technology (KAUST), the first such institution of higher learning in the Kingdom. In a TV channel (*al-Majd*) discussion Shithri stated that *ikhtilat* (gender mixing) is not allowed in Islam under any circumstances as it will lead to moral corruption (Al-Shithri, 2009). His remarks were criticised in the local media that hailed the establishment of the KAUST and termed it as path breaking. Reacting to the controversy the chief of the religious police in Mecca Province Ahmad al-Ghamdi termed co-education to be in accordance with Islam (Al-Mufadhali, 2009). Moreover, Egyptian scholar based in Qatar Yusuf al-Qardhawi and Egypt's Grand Mufti Ali al-Jumah too said that mixed education does not violates *shari'a* (Hoteit and Radsch, 2009). Shithri, however, refused to take back his comments and was eventually relieved of his membership in the CSU (*Al-Arabiya*, 2009). Shithri's dismissal was a rare departure from the normally respectful and complimentary relations the members of CSU share with the regime.

There are two ministries that are largely the domain of Wahhabi ulema; Ministry of Justice (MoJ) and Ministry of Islamic Affairs, Endowments, Dawah and Guidance (*Awqaf*). The MoJ manages the judiciary from local to highest level and thus allows the ulema to have considerable influence. As discussed later in this chapter, despite some reforms, the ulema have not lost their influence in the judiciary and continue to act as guardians of *shari'a* and its implementation. The *Awqaf* manages mosques, organises Quran study circles, appoint preachers, undertake missionary and philanthropic works and takes care of religious endowments, thus becoming an important administrative body in managing religious affairs (MoIA, 2009). There has not been much attempt to reform the body as it has strong links with local tribal leaders and has deep roots in the

society. The only exception being that it has started to appoint women preachers and officials in managing its affairs as discussed in Chapter Six.

Yet another important religious body is the General Presidency for Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice (*al-Ri`asa al-Amma li Amr bi al-Maruf wa Nahi an al-Munkar*; popularly known as Hai'a), that serves as religious police tasked with guarding public morality. Formed in 1940, the Hai'a was supposed to enforce *shari'a* in public. A huge organisation headquartered in Riyadh with branches in all provinces was formed as a trade-off between Ibn Saud who was introducing various modern tools for welfare in fields of education, communication, transportation etc. and the Wahhabi ulema who 'foresaw' the ill effects of these 'Western' tools that would 'destroy' Islamic morals to be maintained in public and private spheres. In reality the Hai'a guarantees an administrative role for the ulema in controlling public sphere. In recent years, the *mutawwa* (religious police appoint by the Hai'a) has acquired a bad name due to their boorish behaviour. Saudis have started to hate the religious police for its bad behaviour and inconsiderate attitude. Abdullah in his reform efforts put some curbs and in 2006, it was barred from questioning and conducting investigation without mandatory presence of the local police. In 2012, Abdul Latif al-Shaikh a member of powerful al-Shaikh family and recognised as a moderate figure was appointed as the chief of the Hai'a. Upon taking over, he announced a number of measures to restrict the power of *mutawwa* including barring them from making arrests, conducting interrogation and carrying out searches without a warrant from the local governor (Al-Alawi and Schwartz, 2012).

The other institution that allows establishment ulema spread their influence and that has flourished over time is Islamic universities. All these universities are generously funded by the government and have flourished since the 1980s when the regime enhanced funding and infrastructure development for Islamic educational institutions after the Kaaba siege incident and Islamic revolution in Iran (Al-Saif, 2013). The most influential among the Islamic universities is Imam Muhammad bin Saud Islamic University, Riyadh. Other prominent Islamic universities include the Islamic University in Medina and Umm al-Qura University in Mecca. Graduates from these universities largely provide the Kingdom with its religious bureaucracy and are principally

employed as judges, teachers, preachers, Imams, *muezzins* (those who give prayer call in mosques), *mutawwa*, and advisors (Taheri, 2004). They enjoy influence among the people through their daily interactions but have limited political influence. A significant aspect of the religious establishment is that it is a major sector providing employment and economic sustenance for a large number of people and accounts for nearly 25 per cent of government employees (Al-Saif, 2013).

Independent Religious Leaders and Preachers

Indeed ulema who eschew power have been respected in Muslim societies throughout history and this continues to be so in the present day Saudi Arabia (Zaman, 2009; Zaman, 2013). These independent ulema are respected for their knowledge and are sought after for their opinion. These preachers are known to be critical of the government and are popular among the public because they do not hold official position and do not endorse all of the regime's policies and actions (Alhargan, 2012). Some of these independent ulema are recognised as the main dissident voices against the al-Saud rule. Independent ulema include those who adhere to non-Wahhabi school and do not find favour among the establishment ulema and sometimes might be associated with an opposition movement. Shia clergy are other group among independent Saudi ulema; they generally operate independently and occupy considerable influence among followers. It does not mean that all Wahhabi ulema are part of the establishment, many especially the younger generation have joined opposition either with the extremists or moderates and form part of independent ulema.

Two important points should be noted; one, the number of independent ulema is small compared to establishment ulema and two, they do not form a coherent group, thus do not have a collective social or political influence. They are small in number because of the institutionalised system of religious education that is governed by the state. Secondly, the graduates from religious universities are dependent on the government for employment. Those who rescue themselves from government intervention and influence in the curricula and financial dependence on the state find it difficult to sustain in an environment where social prestige and respect comes easily with government position and affluence. Even if one manages to remain disinterested in regime's religious agenda and finds alternative source of sustenance, it is difficult to gain social acceptability as

independent preacher because of the pervasive nature of the state that does not appreciates religious autonomy beyond private rituals. In such an environment it is difficult to form an independent religious bloc as it can be done only secretly or without posing any threat to the authority of establishment ulema or the regime.

In spite of this situation, there have been some opposition groups who have developed around independent preachers who have attracted large following but were unable to come on one platform due to them adhering to different schools, sects and worldviews (Zuhur, 2005: 1, 28, 47). Despite such a situation some of the independent religious figures have been able to acquire considerable social influence and groups that are popular included *al-Sahwa al-Islamiya* (Islamic Awakening) which held Islamist-reformist tendencies and was very active during the early 1990s. It gradually lost ground mainly due to government action against its activities and only a small remnant of the Sahwis remained active as of 2010 (Lacroix, 2011). Other groups include those with 'Islamo-liberal' views and the *jihadi* elements that call for overthrow of al-Saud by violent means.

Safar al-Hawali (b. 1950), Salman al-Oudah (b. 1956) and Saad al-Faqih (b. 1957) were some of the prominent figures of the Sahwa movement and were associated with the Committee for the Defence of Legitimate Rights (*Lajnat al-Difa an al-Huquq al-Sharia*; CDLR) founded in 1993 in Riyadh. The movement was critical of the Saudi regime and accused it of having lost the religious legitimacy to rule. The CDLR was seen as the first opposition group in the Kingdom to have openly challenged the regime. The monarchy responded with force and the Committee was banned while a number of its leaders were imprisoned. They were later released or allowed to go into exile and the rest were co-opted and as of 2010, the CDLR had largely lost its sheen and political vigour (Fandy, 1998; Lacroix, 2011; Al-Saif, 2013).

Another group of ulema, who hold Wahhabi worldview but act independently of the establishment and were inspired by Muslim Brotherhood's (hereafter Brotherhood) started to gain following towards the 1990s (Al-Rasheed, 2006). Although they were initially patronised by senior Wahhabi ulema, the invitation and stationing of American troops on Saudi soil during the Kuwait crisis infuriated them and they became critical of

the senior ulema who had justified the al-Saud decision through their *fatwa*. Another important aspect of these activist Wahhabi religious preachers was that a majority of them neither belonged to the traditional Wahhabi families nor were they from the Wahhabi heartland of Najd. Largely, they were from the marginalised southern parts of Saudi Arabia (Al-Saif, 2013). The group was critical of the Saudi government because of its 'failure' to work towards the goals set by the initial alliance between the al-Saud and al-Shaikh, that is, establishment of a puritan 'Islamic' state (Fandy, 1998). Thus, while the establishment ulema justified government policies, those belonging to opposition movements chose to challenge the state as it lacked proper adherence to Islam (Alshamsi 2011).

There are many other groups and independent ulema who subscribed to the ideas of Sahwa. Many are fond of the Brotherhood ideology while others are ideologically inclined towards Salafi scholar Muhammad Surur Zayn al-Abdin (b. 1938) and are known as the Sururi group (Al-Rasheed, 2006). According to Tawfiq al-Saif (2014) the history of Brotherhood in Saudi Arabia can be divided into three stages associated with figures such as Manna al-Qatan (1925-1999), Ahmed al-Sawwaf (1911-1992), Mahdi Akef (b. 1928) and Moneim al-Azzi (b. 1938). He argues that the Brotherhood lacked resources to make inroads into the society and it was only during the 1980s when al-Azzi was leading its activities that it gained some ground. The authorities did not allow the Brotherhood to spread much and the group too refrained from political activism, which provided space for activist Salafi groups, most importantly the Sururi movement (Al-Saif, 2014).

Towards the end of 1990s *jihadi* elements who were more radical and were vehemently against the stationing of American troops had become popular compared to the Sahwis and other moderate groups including Sururis and Islamo-liberals. They were ready to take up arms against the state and led by al-Qaeda called for armed struggle against the regime. The group had started to work inside Saudi Arabia towards mid-1990s and plotted a number of violent attacks on American military installations in Riyadh (1995) and Khobar (1996). However, the group could not succeed in overthrowing the regime as Saudi and American security establishments geared up to deal with the threat and thwarted their attempts (Heghammer, 2010). The early response among the authorities

against al-Qaeda's effort for recruitment was not enthusiastic and the group gained ground between 1998 and 2001. The 11 September 2001 attacks in the US highlighted the magnitude of the problem and were followed by bombings inside the Kingdom during 2003-04 highlighting the dangers posed by the *jihadi* groups to the al-Saud rule. It forced the authorities to take action and with the help of the US, Saudi Arabia developed and deployed counter-terror mechanism to deal with the situation (Cordesman and Obaid, 2005).

Some scholars argue that the religious radicalisation and rise of *jihadi* elements are a result of the emphasis on religion and that the policy of promoting 'radical' Wahhabi Islam has come to haunt the regime. According to Amir Taheri, the "exaggerated emphasis on the role of religion in society and the use of Islam as a political ideology" created conditions for conservatism and extremism to flourish as a "natural attribute to Saudi society" (Taheri, 2004: 459). Others concur and argue: "Historically, the state has tolerated radical or militant groups that do not attack it directly or challenge its legitimacy, while cracking down harshly on those who do either" (Alterman and McCants, 2015: 144).

In the post-11 September scenario the political situation witnessed some churning and a group of reformist ulema comprising activists and thinkers opposed to the Wahhabi religious orthodoxy started to articulate their views. These are independent scholars who had on a number of occasions petitioned the King to introduce reforms within an Islamic framework. The group is not monolithic and includes many hues of religious affiliations including Shias. The spectrum of incidents and emerging situation led to the prominence of this 'Islamo-liberals' ulema that had started to emerge during the 1990s but had remained obscure as it was not as vocal as the Wahhabis, Sahwis, Sururis and Jihadis (Dekmejian, 2003; Lacroix, 2004). Some of these independent ulema are Abdullah al-Hamed, Said Tayeb, Yusuf al-Ahmad, Ali Alkhudair and Shia scholar Baqr al-Nimr.[3]

[3] Al-Nimr is recognized as socially conservative but advocated political opening. In October 2014, a court in Riyadh convicted him of capital punishment for his alleged involvement in inciting crowds to demonstrate against the government and calling for secession of the Shia majority province (Al-Sulami, 2014). His execution along with 47 others on 2 January 2016 led to break down of diplomatic relation with Iran.

It was during the post-11 September period that these scholars were able to formulate "a common democratic, nationalist, and anti-Wahhabi political platform, thereby giving birth to a new trend within Saudi political-intellectual field" (Lacroix, 2004: 346). Their main objective highlighted in their manifestoes and petitions was reforms with emphasis on issues such as the respect for human rights, ending discrimination, addressing unemployment and according the women their due rights ascribed by the *shari'a* (Dekmejian, 2003). These reformist ulema held the view that any socio-political reform cannot come without religious reforms, thus, they called on the al-Saud to distance it from the traditional Wahhabi narrative of Islam that according to them had become redundant on many counts. Moreover, they argued that contradictory to its early goals, Wahhabism has emerged as a *madhab* (school) (Lacroix, 2004; Alhargan, 2012).[4]

In dealing with the emergent situation, King Abdullah accepted their petitions and promised to initiate reforms. Some of their demands were accepted and reform measures, especially in the field of education and women's rights, were taken during his reign. It gave an impression that the al-Saud was serious about reforms and is ready to curb the traditional Salafist groups who were held responsible for fomenting radicalism. Scholars argue that the enthusiasm and pace for reforms started to diminish as the situation was brought under control through counter-terrorism and de-radicalisation measures of the Interior Ministry under Naif and his son Muhammad (Al-Rasheed, 2009).

As protests and demonstrations, popularly known as Arab Spring, spread in many parts of the West Asia and North Africa since December 2010, Saudi Arabia remained largely quite. Although incidents of violence and protests in the Shia dominated areas were witnessed, largely the situation remained under control. Given the instability the Arab Spring caused in many countries, the Saudi opposition either Islamist or liberals chose to remain silent, because either they did not want to attract government's ire or feared the spread of chaos and instability. Many groups came out with petitions and reforms within the existing political structure and within the framework of *shari'a*.

[4] One of the main tenets of Wahhabi interpretation is to do away with the idea of *taqleed*, that is, mandatory following of one of the four recognized schools in Sunni jurisprudence. The Islamo-liberals argued that following Wahhabi interpretation is akin to *taqleed* that Wahhab was against.

While supporting King Abdullah's gradualism, some of the Saudi leaders such as Ali Alkhudair, Saleh Mohammad Almunajed, Humood Altuwaijri and Hamid Al'ali viewed "demonstration as a permissible way of expression" for protesting against oppression and injustice (Alhargan, 2012). Notably, there are not much organised religious movement that challenges the regime. Liberal scholars do not wish to challenge the regime for fear of prosecution, while most of the Islamists have either been co-opted by the regime or have been coerced into submission.

Reform Initiatives

The Saudi society has undergone numerous changes reflected in its demographic and structural transformations and changes in the condition of women as has been discussed in previous chapters. At the same time, throughout the period covered in this research, numerous reform initiatives by the monarchy have undermined the role of ulema as initiatives were taken to counter religious radicalism due to internal demands and external pressures. Some were aimed at improving the functioning of the system while others intended fulfil demands from Saudis. Large sections of the society, especially the youth, are not satisfied with this piecemeal approach towards reforms and are restless with this 'gradualism' (Murphy 2013a). They demand radical reforms, curbs on religious establishment and seek better education, employment opportunities and political opening (Quamar 2014-15). One could identify four issues that signal the diminishing influence of the ulema: national and interfaith dialogue, education reforms, judicial reforms and municipal elections.

National and Interfaith Dialogue

One of the major reform initiatives to develop and encourage a culture of debate and to fight against rising religious extremism was the introduction of the national dialogue in 2003. Towards meeting this aim the *Markaz al-Malik Abdulaziz li al-Hiwar al-Watani* (King Abdulaziz Center for National Dialogue) was founded the same year with the following objectives:

> Consolidating national unity, presentation of moderate views of Islam through constructive dialogue, tackling social, cultural, political, economic and educational problems, promoting the concept and characteristics of dialogue within the society and turning them into a method for dealing with various types of problems, strengthening the role of civil societies, ensure justice, equality and freedom of expression within the

> framework of the Shari'a law and developing a strategic vision for national dialogue and ensuring the application of the results obtained in the process (KACND, 2011).

The aim was to allow for some debate on important social issues and in the process to regain the political ground lost to extremist elements in the wake of the 11 September attacks.

This was an important step for a system where political expression is discouraged and public sphere is very limited. The main reason for taking this initiative was that the then regent and Crown Prince Abdullah understood that eradication of extremism cannot happen without accommodating liberal and reformist elements. It was to satisfy these elements that had in the past demanded political opening through memorandums and petitions that the national dialogue initiative was introduced. Abdullah in his speech to announce the establishment of the centre said:

> I have no doubt that the establishment of the centre and the continuation of the dialogue will turn out to be a historic achievement, which would go a long way toward creating a new channel for responsible self-expression. In the long run, this will be very effective in *fighting extremism and fanaticism and can create a healthy and clean environment which promotes enlightened attitude and rejects terrorism and terrorist ideologies* (Abdullah, 2003; emphasis added).

This highlighted the concern in the Saudi regime regarding rising religious extremism. It came soon after the 11 September attacks and the bombings in Riyadh and further signified the enormity of the problem.

The national dialogues sought to bring together leading intellectuals, ulema, academics, writers and journalists to debate about important social, religious and cultural issues and find solution to people's grievances. Madawi al-Rasheed, an ardent critic of the Saudi regime, argues that the initiative has limitations as it was "far from being an independent initiative organized and run by autonomous civil society association" (Al-Rasheed, 2009: 589). She, however, cautions on rejecting it and points that it

> ... should not be simply dismissed as window dressing. The fact that Saudis were brought from all sectors and intellectual backgrounds to debate important topics long considered taboo, and only discussed behind closed doors, is an achievement in itself in a country where top-down policy has been a feature of governance for many decades (ibid.: 590).

The initial response to the national dialogue was encouraging. Liberal intellectuals, reformist activists and prominent citizens were buoyed by the idea of such an endeavour. Issues such as religious extremism, terrorism, religious moderation, tolerance towards other faiths and condition of women were discussed and many local

scholars and intellectuals emphasised on the need to promote understanding of other faiths and religions to discourage Saudi youths from taking the path of extremist (Kéchichian, 2013; Thompson, 2014). These debates were loaded with religious arguments and articulations that how Islam promotes peace and harmony among various faiths but indicated towards a shift in the role and place of religion. These shifts were important given the traditional approach towards religion and faith in Saudi society. The early enthusiasm for the dialogue gave way to inertia as people became disillusioned with its outcome. While important issues came for debate in the early sessions, the later sessions, according to some commentators, were not as relevant (Al-Rasheed, 2009; Thompson, 2011; Thompson, 2014).

In addition to the national dialogue initiative, Saudi Arabia took interest in promoting interfaith dialogue. The idea for an interfaith dialogue was conceived during the Islamic Summit at Mecca in December 2005 (KAAICIID, n.d.). King Abdullah during his meeting with Pope Benedict XVI discussed the idea in November 2007 and in June 2008, the International Islamic Conference for Dialogue was organized in Mecca where the modalities for interfaith dialogue were discussed. The first interfaith dialogue was convened in Madrid that witnessed participation of 54 countries. Finally, the King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue (KAICIID) was inaugurated in Vienna in 2012 (Al-Tamimi, 2012).

The Saudi interfaith dialogue was uniquely positioned because of the direct involvement of the monarch as similar initiatives in Jordan and Qatar did not evoke global attention (Kèchichian, 2013). Its objective was to promote dialogue between various religions to understanding of and tolerance towards faiths (KAACIID, n.d.). This was done in the context of accusation that Wahhabi Islam abhors other faiths. Rising extremism and pressure from within and outside forced King Abdullah in promoting the interfaith dialogue, which also helped his image as an Arab-Muslim leader. He made it a point to invite Shia religious leaders, prominent women and liberal intellectuals as well as ulema from different schools of Islamic jurisprudence and leaders from other walks of life to the interfaith dialogues.

Many scholars suggest that these initiatives should be seen as an effort by the monarchy to handle the demand for political opening inside the Kingdom (Al-Rasheed, 2009; Thompson, 2011; Thompson, 2014; and Kèchichian, 2013). It is argued that the main aim of the monarchy in taking such initiatives is to allow a platform for people to express their grievances within the framework of the established political system, thus, discouraging people to take arms and violent means to oppose the al-Saud rule (Kèchichian, 2013). Others point that even though the initial enthusiasm for the national dialogue process faded and a sense of inertia jettisoned the functioning of the centre, some of the new initiatives such as the idea to initiate cultural discourse are encouraging and should be taken seriously; more so because it provides "both the space for dialogue as well as the opportunity for increased cross-constituency interaction" in the context of Saudi society (Thompson, 2011: 180). One of the major drawbacks of these initiatives was that they were all state sponsored. Therefore, the idea to have a public sphere that is free from state intervention was defeated at the outset.

Notably, these national and interfaith dialogues were not confined to religious leaders; the issues were largely related to social and cultural domains including education, condition of women and religious tolerance and the ulema were not at the driving seat. The liberals, reformists, academics and intellectuals including Shia and women were discussing these issues. While most of the issues were being discussed within the Islamic framework, they were not typically Islamic. These were issues that any society in a state of transition and flux and is stuck between the forces of tradition and modernisation would debate and engage with. For example, the first national dialogue in July 2003 in Riyadh focussed on "Reinforcing National Unity" and the second in December 2003 in Mecca was on "Extremism and Moderation, a Comprehensive Methodological Perspective." The other issues that were discussed were "Women: Rights, Duties and their Relationship to Education" (2004, Medina), "Issues of Youth: Reality and Aspirations" (2004, Dhahran), and so on. Even if the national dialogue does not add much if seen in the context of debate on democratisation, it is a step in the direction to have some mechanism for expression of views without radically affecting or altering the existing system.

Education Reforms

Education is an area that has witnessed remarkable strides since the early 1990s (Bahgat, 1999; Al-Eisa, 2009). Earlier school education was based on Egyptian model but with a heavy dose of Wahhabi Islam (Prokop, 2003). As part of a deal with the ulema and their Islamic agenda, administration of the education system was placed in their hands. When the Kingdom embarked on modern education in 1950s, there was opposition from the ulema who argued that it leads to westernisation and moral decay (Lipsky, 1959). To placate them the monarchy allowed significant religious content in the curriculum and the ulema were given a stake in the administration and functioning of the education system and formulation of the education policy (Al-Eisa, 2009). This helped in establishment of a modern education system but ulema remained in the fore-front, making it a unique amalgamation with modern methods but with a largely traditional and Islam-centric curriculum. In the beginning this was an achievement for the newly-established Kingdom that had remained away from new developments in education both pedagogically as well as in its curriculum, but this approach fomented religious extremism due to the overdose of puritanical Islam.

The first major incident that highlighted the problem and shocked the al-Saud was the 1979 Kaaba siege by Juhaiman al-Utaibi and accomplices. Given the regional atmosphere after the Iranian revolution and the situation arising out of siege of Kaaba, and the political influence of ulema, the Kingdom took a rather surprising policy decision and further spurred the financial support towards religious education with generous grants for Islamic universities (Al-Rasheed, 1996; Prokop, 2003). This approach of emphasising on religious education came back to haunt the al-Saud in the form of the 11 September 2001 attacks in which 15 of the 19 attackers were Saudi nationals. The petition fever in the aftermath of the Kuwait Crisis had already highlighted the problems facing the society due to lack of quality education (Bahgat, 1999; Rugh, 2002). Economic compulsions and growing religious fanaticism forced the monarchy to bring wholesome change in approach towards school and higher education with focus shifting from religious curricula to vocational and skill-based education to prepare the youth for the market (Prokop, 2003; Bosbait and Wilson, 2005).

As a result, professional colleges and technical institutions were established and measures were devised to improve the infrastructure for higher education. In 1989, Saudi Arabia had around 14,000 institutions, including seven universities and 11 teachers' training colleges, besides schools for vocational and technical training, special needs and adult literacy (MoI, 1998). Budget allocation for education and human resource development witnessed constant increase during the period (MEP, 2010). The real push for comprehensive reform in the education system came due to two incidents that directly affected the domestic socio-political situation and infuriated the international public opinion. The first was the Kuwait Crisis and the subsequent political environment and the second was the 11 September attacks in the US. These events put the monarchy under immense internal and external pressure to bring large-scale reforms, most importantly in the field of education.

During 1991 and 2010, Saudi Arabia took several measures to improve the education system and moderate its religious and extremist influences. Projects such as *Comprehensive Educational Assessment* and *King Abdullah Public Education Development* (popularly referred to as *Tatweer* (development)) were launched in 1996 and 2005 respectively to improve school education. In 2002, the General Directorate of Girl's education was merged with the Ministry of Education after the outcry against the behaviour of *mutawwain* that led to the death of a number of girls in a school-fire in Mecca. The Ministry of Education witnessed a change of guard in 2009 when Faisal bin Abdullah al-Saud, son-in-law of King Abdullah and husband of Princess Adela bint Abdullah, was made Minister of Education (2009-2013).[5] The step underlined Abdullah's personal interest in educational reforms and was seen as part of his effort to expedite the process. In the same year, Norah al-Fayez was appointed as Deputy Minister of Education (2009-2015) in-charge of girl's education and it was for the first time a woman had been named deputy minister.[6]

[5] He was replaced by Khalid al-Faisal in the cabinet reshuffle in December 2013.

[6] She was removed in the cabinet reshuffle after King Salman took over the rule upon demise of Abdullah.

More steps were taken to improve the school and higher education such as curriculum development, text-book revision, teachers' training, monitoring of classes and proper channelization of funds (Al-Eisa, 2009). One of the major problem areas was the school curriculum that came under intense scrutiny particularly after 11 September 2001 attacks (Abu Taleb, 2005). Heavy dose of religion in the school curriculum for general education despite a separate curriculum for religious education was the main worry and the influence of the ulema had prevented any reform. For example, when talks of curriculum overhaul started, a section of ulema led by Abdullah bin Jibreen came out in opposition and petitioned the government against changing school curriculum based on Islamic principles (ibid) but under internal criticism and international scrutiny, the authorities recognised the need to revamp the school curriculum. In 2003 the Ministry of Education developed a *Ten year Strategic Plan, 2004-2014*, which sought effective changes in the curriculum (MoE, 2003). Subsequently, the need for revision of school text-books was recognised, particularly to get rid of offensive remarks against other faiths including Jews, Christians, Shias and non-Wahhabi Sunni Muslims. A royal study group constituted in 2004 recognised the need for revision of Saudi school text-books and later Prince Turki al-Faisal, on his appointment as Ambassador to the US, said that "the Kingdom has reviewed all of its education practices and materials and has removed any element that is inconsistent with the needs of modern education" (Shea, 2006).

Higher education too witnessed improvements with focus on improving professional training and science education and budget allocation. Plans were envisioned to improve the quality of higher education as well as infrastructure expansion. Towards achieving these goals, the Ministry of Higher Education developed a strategic plan that aimed at capacity building and harmonising university education with the developmental needs of the country. It envisages improving the quality of education, development of scientific research, establishing strategic partnership with international higher education institutions of repute, facilitating modern administration and expanding the financial resources of higher educational institutions (MHE, 2009: 2). In the same vein, establishment of private universities and institutions of higher education was allowed in 2001.

Though the higher educational infrastructure has expanded leading to improved accessibility, questions over quality remains. The focus on religious education at the higher education level that attracts considerable attention and resources signifies the continued influence the religious establishment wields. This is starker when one looks at the condition of social science and humanities. The situation in the Gulf countries is more or less similar but the problem in Saudi Arabia is critical because of heavy emphasis on religious institutions. As the 2010 *World Social Science Report* points out, "In the social sciences and humanities, an instrumental approach to research dominates: sociology effectively takes the shape of social engineering, economics is primarily business-oriented and Islamic philosophy or law dominates within the humanities" (Arvanitis et al., 2010: 68).

Education reforms included expansion in terms of opportunities and access to marginalised sections including the Shias, women and rural population. The number of girl's school and their enrolment increased manifold and the same is true for university education. In 1990-91, the ratio of girl's to boy's school was approximately 50 per cent and in the next ten years it reached parity and in 1999-2000, there were nearly equal number of schools for boys and girls (MoE, 2010). Similarly, the enrolment of girls in schools increased while dropout ratio among girls decreased. For example, in 2005 the dropout ratio among boys at secondary to tertiary level was as high as 45-50 per cent while it was 35-40 per cent among girls (UNESCO, 2008). A similar trend was witnessed at the higher education level and according to the Ministry of Higher Education, in 2009 women accounted for 56.6 per cent of the total number of students who graduated from all universities and colleges in Saudi Arabia and 20 per cent of the students going abroad were women (MHE, 2010b).

Similarly, the number of schools in the Shia majority areas grew while new universities and colleges were opened in Shia populated Eastern Province and Najran (MEP, 2009; MHE, 2010c). In addition, Shias have been allowed some degree of autonomy in cultural and educational matters; for example, primary schools run by Shia religious organisation have been allowed to publish their own text-books (Kèchichian, 2013). Saudi school text-books which had derogatory and hateful references towards Shias have either been revised or changed (Shea, 2006) and Shias were allowed to

commemorate Ashura (commemoration of martyrdom of Hussain bin Ali on tenth day of Muharram, the first month of Hijri calendar). A Shia delegation met with Abdullah in 2003 while many Shias were elected in the municipal elections held in 2005 and 2011. In 2013, for the first time, Shia representatives were nominated in the 150-member *Majlis al-Shura*.

Judicial Reforms

The judiciary in Saudi Arabia has traditionally remained under the control of the ulema and is entrenched in Wahhabi Islam and is strongly controlled by the ulema (discussed in Chapter Three). The only parallel could be education which has witnessed substantial reforms undermining religious control. As per the Basic Law, which is mere codification of existing order and practice, Islam is the source of law and *shari'a* is the constitution (Basic Law, 1992). In addition to *shari'a*, the Basic Law mandates decrees issued by the ruler (if they are in accordance with *shari'a*) as the source of judgement (Article 48). Till the late 1990s not much change in the judiciary could be noticed, the only exception being introduction of separate administrative committees to deal with commercial disputes. The committees also tackled cases that Shari'a Courts and Board of Grievances refused to admit because they did not fall under *shari'a* (Al-Jarbou, 2004).

Since 2005, a number of structural changes have been made that have the potential to change the justice delivery system. Under internal and external pressures, King Abdullah initiated measures to limit the influence of clerics and bring uniformity. While some of the judicial practices such as high rate of capital punishment, harsh punishments such as stoning to death, public lashing of convicts etc. have attracted international condemnations, many judgments have also enraged domestic public opinion. One of the cases that galvanised the public anger against judiciary was the conviction of a gang rape victim in 2006 to 200 lashes and a six-month jail term for 'indecent' behaviour in public. Reportedly, Abdullah was upset with the judgement and in a televised statement read out by the Minister of Justice Abdullah al-Shaikh in December 2007 granted pardon and freed the girl (Kèchichian, 2013: 5-6).

A number of steps have since been taken and one of the first steps was institution of a new Judicial Law in October 2007 that envisaged overhauling the judiciary and modernising its functioning (Royal Decree, 2007). It established a Supreme Court in place of the Supreme Judicial Council that had functioned as the highest court since 1975. It also mandated restructuring of the Shari'a Courts to speed up the judgments in case of disputes and appeals, particularly related to administrative issues and envisaged specialised courts to deal with family, labour, criminal and commercial issues to be opened in all provinces. Accordingly, in 2008, specialized criminal courts were established but as of 2015 the reforms were only partially implemented. In addition to criminal courts, family courts have started to function in all provinces since 2014 but the formation of a Supreme Court and other proposed changes are yet to be realised.

Another problem facing the judiciary was lack of specified limits and hierarchies that created confusion and delayed judgments. The new Judicial Law proposed three well-defined layers; beginning with First-Instance Courts at the lowest level to be established in all major cities with specialised domains. Second, the Appellate Courts to hear appeals in disputed cases and to be established in all 13 provinces. At the top, it has provision for the Supreme Court based in Riyadh. They will all work within the limits of *shari'a*. In addition, the Grievances Board (focussing only on administrative issues) was restructured to ease its load and part of its work was transferred to local courts (Eijk, 2010: 158-162). Another important landmark was allowing women to take legal education in 2005 and practice law in 2013 but women can practice only in family courts.

Priority has been given to infrastructure development and in 2007 a sum of US$2.8 billion was allocated to improve functioning of the judiciary. According to Joseph Kèchichian (2013) the restructuring is aimed at establishing an independent judiciary while limiting the influence of the ulema. The changes, however, remained limited and *shari'a* remains the guiding principle for law and ulema the final authority in interpretation of *shari'a*. Jurists and magistrates will have to abide by Wahhabi interpretations of *shari'a*, thus a real change in the judiciary remains elusive. On top, it has generated debate and criticism from both conservative and reformist sections; reformists have termed the efforts as 'piecemeal steps' and argue that it will not have

much impact on the system, on the other hand the conservatives feel that the monarchy is tinkering with the basic tenets of the judiciary which will undermine the role of *shari'a* (Kèchichian, 2013; McDowall, 2014).

Municipal Elections

Despite some elections to the effect of professional guilds and chambers of commerce in Riyadh, Jeddah and other cities and participation of women in them, election for public offices is a novelty in Saudi Arabia. The first elections were held during February and April 2005 that elected half of the members for the municipal councils in all 13 provinces. Though only male candidates were eligible to vote and contest, there was enthusiasm among the people to elect their representatives for the municipal councils. Peaceful elections were held in all parts and people from various backgrounds were elected but predominantly moderate Islamist candidates succeeded (Al-Rasheed, 2009). However, these were not clerics but largely came from modern educational background. The election was historic as it was first of its kind since the formation of the Kingdom in 1932 and indicated monarchy's willingness to expand its support base through elections (Kèchichian, 2013). People were able to discuss important issues and many indulged in discussions on the role of clerics and need for reforms in religious school curricula (Al-Sulami, 2008).

The 2005 election was mostly experimental in nature and generated public interest including among youths, tribal leaders, clerics, businesspersons, reformist activists, Islamists and among Shias in the Eastern Province (Ménoret, 2005; Kraetzschmar, 2011). Some termed it as a step forward towards democratization albit with limited opening (Al-Rasheed, 2009; Kéchichian, 2013; Thompson, 2014). Saudi analysts, on the other hand, observed that it was major step forward and together with other reforms, would pave way for a vibrant political culture (Al-Sulami, 2008). The next elections scheduled for 2009 were delayed due to disagreements on expanding the voter base and giving more power to the councils (Al-Shae', 2011) and this led to the extension of its tenure by two years.

Eventually, it was decided to conduct the 2011 elections without changes as the authorities were not ready to handle an expanded voter's base. It was announced that

changes would be implemented from 2015 elections (*Al-Arabiya*, 2011). The only change made was increase in the number of municipal councils from 178 to 285 leading to an increase in the total number of elected members to 1,056 from 608. The disappointments and lack of enthusiasm for the delayed elections manifested in lower participation despite an increase in the number of registered voters to 1.08 million (*Al-Jazeera*, 2011; *The National*, 2011). Media reports suggested that many Saudis wondered whether the elections have led to any improvement in functioning of the councils while others were disappointed because of limited opening for participation. Though limited, the continuing of elections and the inclusion of women as voters and candidateas in the December 2015 elections indicate a slow and gradual approach towards reforms.

Changing Perception of Religion

As discussed earlier, religion continues to play an important role in the society and remains entrenched in various aspects of life but due to the impact of changes in other spheres including education and economic developments, people's perception of and attitude towards religion has witnessed changes. This is manifested in a number of areas such as popular culture, behaviour of youth, in the attitude of the younger ulema, spread of liberal views as well as women's participation in public life. What are the factors that led to this situation and in what ways these changes are manifested? This section answers these two important questions and tries to locate the significance of religion in the changing social circumstances.

According to Saudi social scientist and activist Tawfiq al-Saif, the changing attitude towards religion and religious movements is evident as the transformations in the society have gradually started to alter

> ... the balance of power in the Saudi social context in a profound manner, and forces calling for social justice and civil rights are earning increasing social popularity. In other words, society is witnessing the decline of the religious political movement ..." (Al-Saif, 2014: 418).

He further contends that neither the state nor the established ulema wish to see social change and do not talk in the language of citizenship and individual's rights rather seek obedience. Amir Taheri (2004) argues that the 11 September 2001 attacks and the bombings and terror attacks inside Saudi Arabia in 2003-04 prompted the al-Saud to

take measures in dismantling 'social circles' aiding extremist elements. Others suggest that these reforms have not been able to satisfy the population who have started to see the extraordinary role of organised religion in the state and society as a problem (Al-Rasheed, 2006; Yamani, 2009; Al-Saif, 2013).

As a result of this awareness the society has been forced to explore alternative ideas. Mai Yamani (2009) suggests that the emerging middle classes understand the need for reforms and changes over the need for preservation and protection of Islam. Madawi al-Rasheed (2006) argues that unlike the largely accepted narrative of a complete observance of the religious and political authority, Saudi situation has created both 'consenting' and 'contesting' intellectual debates. In other words, the perception of religion and religious authority is not uniform and the younger generation feels there is a need to reinterpret and debate religion according the changing circumstances.

Youth and Popular Culture

The youth in their 20s and 30s are leading the debate on role of religion in society but the debates are not held in an open and free atmosphere due to social, religious and political curbs. Nevertheless, the youth find creative and discreet ways and this is most visible in the spread of popular culture. Art, literature, photography, films, painting, cartoons, music, sports and other medium of popular expression have found their ways among Saudi youth and have become part of their lives. While internet has proved to be an important medium of artistic expression, local art studios have come up, especially in cities such as Riyadh and Jeddah, showcasing works that explore social issues from different vantage points. Islam though remains an important aspect, through these mediums many wish to challenge the established norms and values and explore new ideas (Quamar, 2014-15). Jonas Otterbeck observes "Pop culture lifestyles are making their entrance into public arenas in Saudi Arabia ... short amateur films from inside homes put on the Web and Saudi death metal bands using the Internet to spread their home recordings" are certainly an indication towards increasing prevalence of popular culture that were hitherto confined to private lives (Otterbeck, 2012: 341-342).

Wahhabi interpretations abhors music and Saudi religious establishment discourages it and only a certain type of local folk music that use sounds created by human voice,

clapping and some traditional musical instruments such as drums are allowed (Shaheen, 2010). Even this traditional folk music industry is largely amateur and is played during local festivities and celebrations around marriages, births etc. Festivals such as the Janadiriya organised by the SANG that celebrates the Bedouin culture and heritage provided a platform for such folkdances and music.[7] Even though some of the Saudi musicians such as Tareq Abd al-Hakim, Talal Maddah and even women singer Etab had become popular in the 1970s and 1980s but they were based outside as the local music scene was non-existent. Since early 2000s, defiance of these codes of conduct by some youth has started to become a trend and internet has provided a platform. Western music has gained a degree of popularity and local radio stations broadcast Hollywood numbers (Quamar, 2014-15). Stereos in vehicles can be seen constantly running loud Arabic or English music and at times can be loud enough to attract the attention of *mutawwa*. This does not deter the youth. There are a number of local artists who produce music and have become popular such as Aala Wardi, Muhammad Abdu, Abdul Majid Abdullah and Rabeh Sager.

The change in the music scene has been termed as a 'quiet revolution' (Robertson, 2008; Otterbeck, 2012). Most of the Saudi western-music bands are underground but some groups have performed in public. One of the first pop video was premiered in a shopping mall in Jeddah in August 2007 that was directed by Kaswara al-Khatib (Otterbeck, 2012). According to some estimates, in 2008 there were around 60 rock and metal bands operating in the Kingdom and were mainly run by youth and created youth-oriented music comprising mainly of heavy metal, hip-hop, jazz and traditional rock (Alosaimi, 2008). Some of the popular bands such as *Wasted Lands* (Jeddah), *Deathless Anguish* (Dammam), *Death Adder* (Riyadh), *AlNamrood* (Qatif) and others have used internet as a medium.

[7] The Janadiriya festival (*Meharjan Janadiriya*) was started in 1985 to celebrate Saudi bedouin culture and heritage with a modern canvas. It was also an attempt to forge the Arab-Islamic heritage with a Saudi national identity. For more see the official webpage of Janadiriya: www.janadria.org.sa (in Arabic). Saudi national dance, *Ardha*, a traditional dance form symbolising preparation for war that involves performance by men carrying sword in the midst of drumbeats and poetry expressing the tribal pride is performed in the festival.

It is suggested that many of the musicians wish to perform and play in open even though it is unlikely to be realised in near future as public music remains banned and even the traditional artists do not appreciate Western influence on music terming rock and metal to be ‘shallow’ (Alosaimi, 2008). Saudi rock bands, however, have made a mark on foreign mainly Arab platforms. Many young Saudi musicians have used “cyberspace to express themselves” and have been able to “travel and perform abroad when they are invited to perform at festivals” in many countries in the Arab world as well as the US and Europe (*Freemuse*, 2008). The new trend can be seen as an expression of political dissatisfaction among Saudi youth who aspire for a freer society. Aiman (known only by his first name), a guitarist with Jeddah based *Wasted Land* told a local daily that “The songs make us speak up and express our feelings”, and the feelings of the dissatisfied Saudi youth (Alosaimi, 2008; *Freemuse*, 2008). Though the music scene remains nominal and confined to private, underground and on the internet, local concern for the bleak scene espouse hope for a turnaround (Saeed, 2012).

Photography and painting are other arenas where the old barriers are breaking down or at least are being questioned and challenged — be it in terms of variety, the number of people engaged in them or in terms of participation of women. In recent years, a number of art galleries in cities like Riyadh and Jeddah have witnessed participation of young artists and photographers indicating increased in the number of people engaged in artistic activities. Jeddah can be seen as the art and culture capital of Saudi Arabia and has a number of art galleries such as *Al Alamia*, *Ayyam*, *Dama Art*, *Nesma Art*, *Athr* and *Arabian Wings* that are owned by individual art connoisseurs and hold regular events displaying works by local, Arab and international artists (Quamar, 2014-15). The city witnessed establishment of Jeddah Art Week (JAW; pronounced as *jaou* which means fun in Arabic) in 2013 to encourage and give expression to the increasing local art scene (JAW, 2014). During the first two art weeks in 2013 and 2014, JAW had seen participation of large number of young Saudi artists who displayed their paintings, sculptures, films and photographs. Similarly, there are individual and private art galleries in Riyadh such as *Alaan Artspace*, *Areej Art Cafe*, *Gallery Design*, *Lahd Gallery* and *Naila Art Gallery* that provide opportunities for established and upcoming local artists as well as organise workshops and educational activities. In addition there

are public institutions such as the *National Museum* which have done their bit in promoting art and culture scene (Quamar, 2014-15).

There are a number of individual Saudi artists who have contributed in promoting art and culture through their work. One such artist is Reem Nazir who has exhibited her works in Jeddah as well as in international cities such as London, Buenos Aires and Dubai. Born in Jeddah, she mostly acquired her education in the West and honed her skills under Freddie Dean at the Chelsea Art Club of London (*One Fine Art*, n.d.). A well-known name in Jeddah's art circle, in 2005 Nazir joined hands with other Saudi women artists to establish a group called *Saudi Women* and holds regular exhibitions (Mubarak, 2005). A significant phenomenon is the number of women who have taken to art and photography for creative expression but there are others who have taken them for commercial purposes such as Tasneem al-Sultan. She has taken to wedding photography as her profession because it provides better opportunities as male photographers cannot attend female gatherings and demand for wedding portfolio has grown exponentially. Based in Dubai, al-Sultan is the first Saudi female to take up professional photography and says that the changing Saudi society has made it possible for women like her to pursue their passion and choose their profession (Ahmed, 2014).

Many young men and women are involved in artistic activities to express their views on problems facing the society and use creative ways to avoid censorship. One such woman is Haifaa al-Mansour who gained international attention for her feature film *Wadjda* that was premiered at the 2012 *Venice Film Festival* and gained critical acclaim. The first film to be shot entirely in Saudi Arabia by a woman director, *Wadjda* also became the first official Saudi entry for Academy Awards (Oscar) in Best Foreign Language Film Category in 2014 (Brooks, 2014). There are many upcoming and young women who have been noticed for their work such as Hatoon Kadi. Hailing from Mecca, she is pursuing a doctorate in the UK and has been known for her comedy show *Noon al-Niswa* (female beauty represented in Arabic alphabet 'noun') that she broadcasts through *Youtube*. The show takes social phenomenon from women's perspective in lighter vain "to make people laugh" (Al-Mukhtar, 2013).

What is evident is that the art and culture scene has been changing, thereby creating a new space for looking at the world differently and away from the prism of established notions of what is ‘acceptable’ and ‘unacceptable’. This space is limited and many a times remains within the confines of private lives and in underground. Such artistic expressions have not gained wider acceptance and attract opposition from the clergy. For example, in 2010 a Saudi cleric and an Imam at the *Masjid al-Haram* in Mecca Adel al-Kalbani stated that singing and music are not *haraam* in Islam. He was admonished by several senior ulema including the chief Imam of *Masjid al-Haram* Abdul Rahman al-Sudais and Grand Mufti Abdulaziz al-Shaikh (*Al-Arabiya*, 2010). They reiterated the widely accepted view that Islam (meaning Wahhabi Islam) prohibits all kinds of music and singing except some folk music. In addition, most of the contemporary Saudi artists have been educated and brought up abroad mostly in the West, thus, it would be wrong to assume that Saudi Arabia has a thriving art scene but these little changes indicate a degree of acceptance of newer ideas, even if confined only to a small section of the people.

Spread of Liberal Ideas

Liberal views and ideas that were unknown or were abhorred by the earlier generations have become points of discussion and debate, especially among the educated youth. It would be an exaggeration to argue that liberal values have become commonplace but not be incorrect that socio-cultural changes have affected the value system influencing people’s attitude towards various issues including religion. The phenomenon is more pronounced among those exposed to the outside world or who were educated abroad. The Kingdom sends a large number of students to universities in the US and Europe for higher education[8] which works as a catalyst for knowing and even imbibing western views on social and political issues but the phenomenon is not confined to only those who have studied abroad rather many younger ulema, products of Saudi religious universities, are getting exposed to ‘modern’ ideas through Arabic and other literature.

[8] One of the flagship programmes to improve higher education among Saudis was instituted in 2005, the King Abdullah Foreign Scholarship Programme supports Saudi student to go abroad for higher studies. According to Ministry of Higher Education (2013) as much as 100,000 Saudis have been funded through this programme and until February 2013 nearly 47,000 had come back to the kingdom. Though there is no study on this, interactions of the author with some of those who had benefitted from the scholarship indicate that they tend to be more amenable to liberal views.

Their views on issues such as gender-mixing, co-education, use of contraceptives, art and music etc. are different from the established notions. The prevalence of mass-media, internet and social media has made it easier to interact with the outside world further leading to spread of liberal views on social issues.

The initial signs that indicated towards the extent of penetration of liberal-reformist views emerged in the early 1990s, when petition fever gripped the Kingdom after the Kuwait Crisis. A number of memorandums and petitions were submitted and were published in local newspapers and journals outlining the need for reforms, curbing extremist tendencies and limiting the role of religion and ulema in social sphere (Abir, 1993). In response many religious leaders petitioned the government to continue to work within the Islamic framework and to not forget their duty of ruling according to *shari'a* (Dekmejian, 1998). This was the first instance when liberals had mustered enough courage to speak in public in a strong voice (discussed in Chapter Three) and certainly contributed towards measures such as the codification of the Basic Law and establishing of the *Majlis al-Shura*. Though the trend subsided towards the late 1990s, it led to increased discussion about religion and its role in public life (Abir, 1993; Aba-Namay, 1993; and Dekmejian, 1998).

The trend again resurfaced after the 11 September attacks and led to a major debate within Saudi civil society on important issues including the role of religion, traditional values and liberal interpretations of Islam. In January 2003, a petition titled *Strategic Vision for the Present and the Future* signed by 104 intellectuals was submitted to Crown Prince Abdullah articulating the need for reforms and institutionalisation of liberal values in the political system, simultaneously emphasising on the need to continue with the Islamic framework (Dekmejian, 2003). Another petition *In Defence of the Nation* was submitted in September that articulated the need for political opening. These petitions were followed by women and Shia petitions, which were remarkable given the extent of their socio-political marginalisation (Rapheli, 2005). Apart from these groups of intellectuals, academics and prominent citizens, many individual voices, particularly those coming from religious background, articulated and expressed views that marked a shift in the socio-political debate (Lacroix, 2004). Though the liberal

voices became somewhat subdued due to lack of substantial reforms, the advent of protest movements in the Arab world in 2010-11 re-energised some of these voices.

They were countered by traditional and conservative voices such as Nasser al-Omar, Saad al-Shithri, Baqr al-Nimr and others who criticised the government for initiating programmes that allows gender-mixing and girls getting exposed to outside world, which according to them is contagious and ruinous for the Islamic heritage of Arabia and is bringing "woe to the nation" (*Gulf News*, 2012b). Some of these came from the establishment ulema but others including non-Wahhabi and Shia ulema too expressed concerns regarding social opening and public participation of women.

The desire among Saudis to see 'progressive' changes in the society is manifested in growing space for a functioning civil society and media and provides a platform for engaging in debate and discussions . Although civil society as it is understood in Western political structures may not be visible in Saudi Arabia, the traditional voluntary sectors are functional and provide alternative forms of civil society. Caroline Montagu argues that "If the voluntary sector is traditionally seen as a key part of civil society, then Saudi Arabia has a thriving civil society" and as part of the political system it "is an important driver for social reform and modernization" (Montagu, 2010: 68). Saudi scholars suggest that the traditional voluntary organisations and civil society go hand-in-hand, thus, blurring the lines between them (Barqawi, 2008; Al-Shahrani, 2008). Former member of the *Majlis al-Shura*, Muhammad Ibrahim al-Helwa, argues that the nature and characteristic of Saudi civil society is different from other countries, particularly in the West, and is strengthened due to formation of professional guilds, sports clubs and women's rights groups (Al-Helwa, 2003).

Even if the character and nature of the civil society differs, its functions are similar to what a civil society provides in democratic political systems. The nature of this function is different in Saudi case and there is cooperation between the ruler and the civil society (Montagu, 2010). What is interesting is that the civil society, which includes traditional charitable societies, non-government organisations, professional guilds and women's clubs, have broadened the scope of public debate and discourse on important issues including religion. Caroline Montagu argues,

> ... civil society in Saudi Arabia is everywhere. Social and political discussion abounds, not within the political parties, but identifiable within groups of broad, informal structures and relationships. Social debate is widespread, as is *discussion of Islam and its traditions*, and of what constitutes liberal, conservative, or essentialist Islam (Montagu, 2010: 69; emphasis added).

Together with civil society, media has also been a catalyst in expanding the scope of public discussions . Many columnists and intellectuals, including women, write about important issues in the local Arabic and English newspapers and magzines. In a number of instances, they have espoused reformist and Islamo-liberal views and were welcomed by the readers. Writers such as Khaled al-Maeena, Tawfiq al-Saif, Samar Fatany, Hatoon al-Fassi and others have expressed concerns on lack of reforms and need for individual freedom in social, religious and cultural domains and for political participation (Quamar, 2014-15). Many a times their views are different from influential sections of ulema but have not been silenced. According to Naomi Sakr (2001) the media landscape is constantly improving reflecting the plurality and heterogeneity of opinions and world views. The view is supported by the *Media Sustainability Index 2008* suggesting that Saudi media is going through a phase of 'rejuvenation' as it is addressing wider issues including some that were hitherto 'unthinkable' despite occasional crackdown by the authorities.

The struggle for media freedom and free speech is a major concern for reformist and liberal voices. They have continued to find ways to express their opinion despite a general rein of government control on media. For example in January 2008, Mohamed al-Tounisi, the editor-in-chief of *Al-Ikhbariya*, a government-owned television news channel was suspended for allowing a woman to express her opinion critical of the government on poverty and corruption (Carnegie Endowment, 2008). Similarly, *Al-Hayat* daily was suspended from publication for four days in December 2008 for allowing one of its columnists to express his opinion on the economic crisis critical of the authorities (*Media Sustainability Index*, 2008). Despite these crackdowns, many columns and opinions that discuss critical social issues have found their way in the local newspapers (*jaraid*) and magazines (*majallat*) (Quamar 2014-15). While regulation and control of media continues, critically important issues are increasingly being articulated in the local media. Another important aspect of the expanding boundaries of the media is the advent of information technology. It has become difficult to put limitations

because of the increasing penetration of internet and social media that allow people to easily and discreetly express their views through blogs and social networking sites. Bloggers such as Ahmad al-Omran of *Saudi Jeans*, Raif Badawi of *Saudi Free Liberal Forum* and Eman al-Nafjan and Manal al-Sharif of *Saudi Women's Weblog* became popular and even faced problems due to expressing 'liberal' and anti-establishment views.

If one goes by the ways and extent of spread of liberal and Islamo-liberal views, particularly when compared to what was the situation earlier, it can be argued that a small but an increasingly growing section of the population is becoming receptive towards new ideas and views. Though it is confined to a small proportion of the population, its reach is continuously increasing due to rising educational standards, exposure to the outside world, increasing penetration of internet and social media, as well as churning within the society.

Youth and Religion

Another significant area that goes parallel with and at times overlaps with the changing popular culture scenario and spread of liberal views is the relationship between youth and religion. According to the *United Nations World Demographic Trends* as much as 50 per cent of the Saudi population is below the age of 25. This generation, according to Madawi al-Rasheed (2006) does not shy away from debating religion and politics leading to a continuous churning with ideas and emergence of new discourses. In her words: "Rather than being paralysed by impotence, the Saudis have produced a complex intellectual tapestry, woven by debating subjects, some of whom consent while other confront" (Al-Rasheed, 2006: 1). Caryle Murphy (2013a) finds that the Saudi youths' attitude and views on religion is changing and they have become tolerant of differences and pluralism in terms of religious interpretations. She further elucidates that although they are not looking for revolutionary political change, their understanding of religion and politics has undergone transformation.

With the advent of satellite television and internet, Saudi youth were exposed to new cultures and ideas and became aware of the plurality within Islam and plurality of views on matters of faith and religion leading to change in understanding of Islam and other

religions and world views espoused in them. Younger generation of Saudis are looking for a more appropriate application of Islam in tune with the changing times (Quamar, 2014-15). Their engagement with new ideas, professions and ways of life is affecting their thinking and attitude towards religion. At times it creates confusion and many find themselves "struggling to choose between conservative ideology at home and the world outside. They are torn between tradition and modernity in a society that has made it difficult for them to form identities uniquely their own" (Faruqui, 2010).

The attitude of younger ulema towards myriad issues of socio-political importance, including the role of religion is changing. Young religious scholars, such as Abdullah al-Maliki and Muhammad Abd al-Karim, are receptive towards concepts of justice, freedom of choice, sovereignty and dignity indicating increasing acceptability of reconciliation of Islam and modernity within the Saudi framework. Many young ulema have publicly articulated the idea that the application of *shari'a* should be by a choice (Al-Rasheed, 2014). Articulation for peaceful *jihad* in the form of civil society activism, demonstrations and civil disobedience have found voice among many young Saudis, including those passing out of religious universities (Quamar, 2014-15). In March 2012, a document – Statement of Saudi Youth Regarding the Guarantee of Freedoms and Ethics of Diversity – by young Saudis was published online which gave an insight about the spread of liberal ideas among them. The statement carrying more than 2,500 signatures of people in their 20s and 30s underscored the religious ferment brewing in the Kingdom, especially among young people and that underlines the fact that religious attitude are becoming 'fluid and diverse' (Murphy, 2013b). The youth do not challenge the Islamic bases of the society but do not wish to accept everything passed on to them by the older generation in the name of religion.

Traditionalist ulema and conservative sections of Saudis find the trend of changing attitude of the youth towards religion troubling and argue that this is ruining the new generations and it could lead to corruption in Islam (*Gulf News*, 2012b). They put pressure on authorities to curb free expression of views on religion and this has at times led to crackdown on bloggers and social media activists such as Ahmed al-Farhan and Raef al-Badawi who on different occasions had articulated views on religion and other socio-economic issues (Ambah, 2008; Black, 2015). Thus, Saudi youth find themselves

in a peculiar situation whereby despite being exposed to liberals views and ideas and despite wanting to pursue a life free from religious control, they are constrained because of social, political, religious and at times familial curbs (Faruqui, 2010; Murphy, 2013a). Private groups and discussion forums of youth to discuss issues of socio-political importance exist where they express the need for political and social change and wish to alter the deep-seated influence of the ulema in the social, political and cultural spheres. Many express the need to learn from other Muslim societies and wish for political change but are held back by the prevailing system (Quamar, 2014-15).

Continuing Strong Influence of Ulema

The decline in political influence of the ulema has more to do with the al-Saud's desire and ability to appropriate power. In addition, their influence in the social sphere too has been compromised. Social change and reforms have encouraged Saudis to make their own choices without using the filter put in place by the ulema to chafe 'external', 'un-Islamic' or rather non-Wahhabi influences. This change in attitude has not substantially altered the influence of the ulema on social issues where their writ prevails despite a desire for change among many sections, especially the reformist intellectuals and educated middle classes. There are issues such as women driving, fixing a minimum age for marriage, allowing sports and physical education for girls in schools, issue of population control and so on where the ulema have prevented any change in government policy. For example, on the question of women driving, many prominent citizens including those from the ruling family endorsed the idea but the powerful religious body, the Committee of Senior Ulema, has issued a *fatwa* prohibiting women from driving as it can lead to more freedom for women and intermixing of sexes and creating *fitna* (chaos) (GPSRI, n.d.). On the basis of this *fatwa*, the authorities continue to deny issuance of license for women. In 2013, Loulwah al-Faisal, daughter of King Faisal, had said in an interview with *France24* that "Personally, I think that a woman should be allowed to drive" (Jacinto 2013) but the ban continues.

On many other issues, the ulema have prevented a change in policy; for example, despite major education reforms, religious subjects continue to have a strong presence in the school curriculum because of the pressure from establishment ulema. Since most

of the teachers in primary, secondary and high schools come from religious universities, their relevance and economic sustenance being rested on religion, insist that it should make a substantial proportion of the curriculum (Prokop, 2003; Al-Eisa, 2009). Despite efforts to modernise the education system, and improvements in the infrastructure the issue of quality education remains. Similarly, on the issue of putting curbs on the functioning of the *mutawwa* the government has been under pressure from the larger public including advocates within the royal family to limit their power but the ulema have prevented any substantial action. For example, in 2003 Walid bin Talal al-Saud who was considered close to his uncle, King Abdullah, said that the government should reign in the religious police as a necessary measure to start religious reforms or to curb the influence of the religious establishment that pose a major hurdle to any transition (Kèchichian, 2003: 103). However, only a few cosmetic changes in the functioning of the religious police could be implemented for a majority of the ulema advocated the idea that *hisba* or *amr bi al-marouf and nahi an al-munkar* (promote good and prevent evil) is the duty of the ruler.

The ulema continue to have a role in bureaucracy. At the higher level, technocrats and academics have diminished their influence but their presence is substantial at middle and lower level across sectors. Ulema are hired in ministries, municipalities, universities, colleges, schools, local police, religious police and other departments and according to one estimate, as much as 25 per cent of the state employees comprise of people who have attained their education in religious schools and universities (Al-Saif, 2013). Thus, despite diminishing influence of the ulema in the government at the higher level, it continues to be a major hurdle for all out reforms as it becomes difficult to implement them on the ground. Ulema continue to have strong influence on socio-cultural matters due to continuing importance associated with purity of faith and significance of ritual practices.

One of the major reasons for the continuing strong influence of ulema is the dependence of the al-Saud on them for legitimacy. Many studies trace the relationship between state and religion in Saudi Arabia and articulate their interdependence (Al-Yassini, 1985; Bligh, 1985; Kjorlien and Michele, 1994; Al-Atawaneh, 2009; and Alshamsi, 2011). It is argued that even though the political influence of ulema has diminished their control

over social matters remains unabated. It is no secret that the state aligned itself with the ulema supporting a literalist brand of Islam while using religion to legitimise the monarchy to appropriate powers (Esposito, 1999; Bradley, 2006). Ghassan Salamé (1987) argues that Hanbali tradition demands complete subservience to the authority of the ruler. This idea of not challenging the ruler until Islam remains the basis of state and society has kept a majority of Saudi ulema to support the al-Saud. Since, the ulema also depend on state largesse for their survival, it become a case of mutual inter-dependence. Thus, they refrain from criticising the ruler confine themselves to religious and social issues, where they receive support from the regime. Others argue that to maintain their role in public affairs, the organised ulema adopted a method of maintaining a distance from both the ruler and the opposition because they neither wanted to be seen as subservient to the authorities nor willing to be associated with opposition (Al-Saif, 2013). It meant that their political influence declined but social significance continued to be strong and their organic and existential link with the state helped ulema continue to carry strong influence.

Frank Vogel (2012) gives an example of how the organised religious establishment exert pressure on the society and continue to hold strong influence. He articulates that the influence of the ulema and their opposition to codification of *fiqh* has prevented judicial reforms and attempts towards this have been thwarted by the ulema. In the latest such attempt, King Abdullah had formed a committee of legal experts to suggest ways and methods for codification soon after he took over in August 2005. The issue was forwarded to the *Hai'a al-Kibar al-Ulema* for their opinion but remains pending as the highest religious body did not give any response, thereby thwarting codification. Similarly, judicial reforms have been opposed by the ulema as it can diminish their social importance (Al-Jarbou, 2007; Vogel, 2012). *Shari'a* and judiciary are understood to be the domains of the ulema like education, and even though their influence on education has weakened due to economic compulsions, they do not want judiciary to become free from their influence. Many of the reform steps proposed in the 2007 regulation (Royal Decree, 2007) to reorganise the judiciary were not liked by the ulema, thus, there were delays in the implementation.

Further, the ulema have adopted new methods and modern technology to protect their influence and interests. They adopt new mediums and adjust to technological developments to reach out to the masses. It happened when audio and video cassettes and satellite channels were introduced and the ulema used them to extend their influence and challenge the narrative of the state and reformists (Zayani, 2012). Many conservative scholars used these mediums to express their opinions on matters related to politics and society and spread views that were against reforms. Similarly, the advent of internet did not deter those advocating a complete rejection of anything Western to adopt internet as a medium to spread their views. Personal blogs and websites carrying *fatwa* and opinion on myriad socio-political issues by the ulema mushroomed soon after it was opened for public in the late 1990s (Teitelbaum, 2002). The social media too have been adopted by these elements to reach out to the masses and to advocate their views against reforms. According to Orit Perlov and Yoel Guznsky (2014) the radical clerics opposing reforms are popular among the netizens with some of them such as Ayed al-Qarni having more than five million followers.

The state, ulema and the society share a peculiar relation; for the state the ulema have strong influence on the society so they cannot be isolated as they are important for the state's continuing legitimacy. Similarly, the ulema do not wish to lose their control in the society as it helps them share power. For the civil society, religion and religious leaders are the only opening they have to be close to the state and thus cannot undermine their interest. Gwenn Okruhlik (2005) sees this relationship of mutual interdependence and articulates that the ordinary citizens and social forces are responsible for the limited reforms and identifies the monopoly of Wahhabi jurisprudence as a major hurdle. The pressure from the below, need for expansion of legitimacy and to check any threat to their authority, the ruler introduce reform measures. This in the context of changing circumstances threatens to undermine the influence of ulema. Therefore, to see that Islam remains at the centre of the social milieu and to keep their socio-political constituency satisfied and intact, ulema oppose reforms. Since the al-Saud acquires legitimacy through Islam and ulema, they cannot completely overrule their opposition. Thus, the ruling family adopts a gradualist approach lest it antagonises the ulema. The arrangement of interdependence between

the ruling family and ulema, that has sustained the al-Saud rule, is also a major hurdle towards reforms.

Conclusion

The centrality of Islam, especially Wahhabi Islam, in Saudi society has not been compromised due to social change and reforms and it remains a very important part of the society and culture. It is engrained in the social and political structures and is part of the local culture and heritage. It forms an important aspect of the local identity. At the same time, the process of social change and some reform initiatives have affected the way people perceived religion and its role in everyday life. This is manifested in spread of liberal ideas, growing popular culture, the way Saudi youth look at religion and the changing status of women as well as developments in terms of a functioning civil society and media. This resulted in a degree of decline in the influence of the ulema but did not lead to complete weaning of their influence. Saudi Arabia despite being a deeply religious society has undergone social and cultural changes that have affected people's perception of religion but Wahhabi ulema continue to have a strong influence on the social and cultural domains and have a substantial say in these matters preventing large scale reforms.

Chapter Eight

Conclusion

Saudi Arabia is seen as a conservative monarchy that has maintained a closed political system and has not allowed political culture to develop and become accommodative of different aspirations of its people. It is difficult to dismiss this proposition because the political ideology of the monarchy relies on an absolutist framework in Wahhabism that does not recognise plurality of thought even within Islam. Therefore, while looking for reforms one has to recognise this inherent and inbuilt resistance to change within the Saudi political system. At the same time, the society has gone through a process of transformation that affected the individual and collective lives. Most importantly the changes were actualised largely because of *social reforms measures* started at the top and despite strong resistance from the Wahhabi ulema standing as vanguard against socio-political change. It could happen because of two reasons; the importance of ulema was compromised due to rise of modern education, or the ulema adopted a selective approach to changes. The ulema, however, are not the only actor and there are several others who have played their role in bringing about or delaying social changes in Saudi Arabia.

Before discussing the social actors and causal factors responsible for the changes, it is important to understand the process and delineate its finer nuances. The changes are ensued in a complex process defined in this research as 'social reforms' and are manifested in wide ranging transformations impacting population composition, social institutions, value systems, condition of women and role of religion and ulema. These changes were slow in early years of the formation of the Kingdom but intensified towards the 1990s deeply affecting the family, clan and tribe-based lives of the people. The process impacted the education system, health care, media, civil society and even public affairs. This unprecedented social transformation influenced all spheres of lives for men, women, children, youth and the elderly and affected the demography, tribal lifestyles, family dynamics, gender relations and identity formation. Saudi Arabia transformed from being a simple tribal society to complex, wealthy and modern

Kingdom leading to *demographic and structural changes* influencing people's lives and creating possibilities for human development even while posing several new challenges.

In the existing literature, economic modernisation is recognised as the most important instigator of social change in Saudi Arabia. The relationship between economic growth and social change is complex and cannot be understood in a simple causal-resultant paradigm. It is a convoluted process where many factors become important and social structure, culture, tradition, faith and education system play a significant role. This sometime leads to uneasy and turbulence in the society and can even lead to struggle among various forces. In Saudi Arabia, the transformation process, among others, manifested in the struggle between forces of 'conservatism' and 'modernisation' represented respectively by Wahhabi ulema and 'liberal' intellectuals.

Both the Wahhabi ulema and 'liberal' intellectuals enjoy a degree of social support; the forces of 'conservatism' enjoy the support of religious sections, tribal leaders, orthodox families, faculty and students in religious institutions, religious bureaucracy and traditional merchant families and political elites including senior members of the royal family. They advocate a pivotal role for Islam in public and private lives and argue for re-Islamisation of those spheres where the role and influence of Islam has declined such as the education system, economy and public affairs. This is traditionally seen as the continuing *influence of ulema* on the state and society with the patronage of the monarchy. The forces of 'modernisation', on the other hand, include 'liberal' intellectuals, reformist academics, educated youth, artists, journalists, professionals, civil society activists and even some ulema and younger members in the ruling family, including princesses. Traditionally they did not enjoy influence but had supporters among the ruling elite and gained a degree of prominence during King Abdullah's rule. In fact, one of the first instances of publicised political debate in the Kingdom in the aftermath of the Kuwait crisis was largely initiated by this section who took to petitions to bring reforms. Gradually the voices of 'modernisation' gained support among women and youth, especially among the new middle classes.

Significantly, there is a sense of fluidity when it comes to those advocating reforms or opposing it. For example, many religious figures have started to advocate

‘modernisation’ and support reforms leading to emergence of an ‘Islamo-liberal’ constituency. Likewise, many who are not trained in religious institutions uphold the banner of ‘conservatism’ and hence, the support for or against reforms depends on the issue and not merely upon a clearly demarcated ideological convictions. For example, some individuals are social ‘conservatives’ but political ‘liberals’ and advocate constitutional monarchy and there are those who are social ‘liberals’ and advocate a degree of individual freedom but are staunch supporter of political status-quo.

Nonetheless, on key social issues, the divide between these two forces is evident. For example, religious sections who uphold the banner of ‘conservatism’ oppose reforms in education system and judiciary and are vociferously opposed to any public role for women. They argue that Islam – as interpreted by Wahhab – is the basis of the state and should therefore be the basis for public life including education and judiciary. For them all aspects of social life should be governed by laws derived from *shari’a* and its interpretation by Wahhabi ulema. Thus, education should exclude everything that is against Wahhabi Islamic teachings such as the idea of evolution of life. Similarly, they argue for not tinkering with the judiciary, thus laws that are discriminatory like testimony of believer and non-believer or men and women and ‘savage’ punishments like public execution cannot be done away with. Even those ‘conservative’ who accept women’ rights to education and work argue that they should be done in a strictly segregated space. The ‘modernists,’ on the other hand, advocate incremental reforms in all areas and due to pressures from this section that many reforms have been initiated in the education system, judiciary and towards improving condition of women. For example, the ‘conservative’ ulema were opposed to allowing participation of women in the economy until the 1980s and only after the debate that ensued in the 1990s that they agreed to the notion of ‘working’ women. In a limited manner, this has led to *bridging the gender divide* in Saudi society.

The most important actor, however, is the monarchy that patronises both the forces of ‘modernisation’ and ‘conservatism’ and balances reforms to suit its interests and demands. In the process, it plays the role of both mediator and arbiter. It has authority and power and also enjoys the support of a cross-section of the population. It is playing this role since the establishment of the Kingdom but with the changing socioeconomic

atmosphere and increasing political friction among various groups, the monarchy has strengthened its role and established itself as the sole legitimate actor that can steer the country. It has access to resources which is used to sustain the support base and balance demands from all sections so as to not alienate any group including the largely marginalised Shias. Thus, upholding the idea of a benevolent ‘guardian’ it takes care of needs of all its ‘children’ (citizens), upholds Islam as the basis of the state, rules according to teachings of the Prophet and interpretations of the ‘Shaikh’ (Muhammad bin Abdul Wahhab). This unique situation is as much a result of the ‘rentier social contract’ as that of the tribal social structure.

The system is a product of the historical and traditional socio-political structures whereby the dominant family ruled and others accepted its authority. This tribal system was always based on some contract but most importantly had provisions of security and benevolence. Even if in contemporary Saudi Arabia, sources and modes of this contract are different, that is, oil-wealth and modern administration, the legitimacy is based on ensuring security and benevolence. This historical traditional structure remains intertwined in the social psyche. The monarchy has kept the system intact as it serves its interests even while bringing about gradual reforms to accommodate emerging demands and challenges.

The monarchy took initiatives for providing better health care facilities resulting in improved demographic indicators such as mortality and fertility rates and improvement in maternal and child mortalities. As a result of the oil boom-related development, the Kingdom witnessed a huge population growth that was also aided by the large influx of foreign workers engaged in the expanding economy and public services. One of the most significant areas where improvement became necessary was the education system; first, it expanded at the school level and later in higher education. Expansion in the school education and accessibility to marginalised sections including among rural population, Shias and women resulted in the Kingdom achieving universal primary education in the mid-2000s. Further, growth in the higher education led to an increase in the number of men and women acquiring higher education and professional skills leading to better human resource development and improved participation of citizens, both men and women, in the labour force.

Towards mitigating criticism about rising radicalism, especially in the wake of 9/11 terror attacks, changes in school curriculum and text-books were initiated, also indicating fears within the establishment of rising tide of radicalisation among Saudi youth. Teacher’s training and family counselling programmes were also initiated to ensure that the young get best education and eschew from the path of extremism.

Reforms in the functioning of judiciary and religious bureaucracy are an important part of the transformation process and led to streamlining the functioning of religious police and inclusion of female religious scholars in administration and bureaucracy albeit in junior positions. Measures were also taken to put curbs on power and functioning of *mutawwa* to deal with constant complaints of harassment of citizens in public places. The religious police was asked to work in coordination with local administration and its powers to raid private houses and make arrests were withdrawn. Similarly, the judiciary was revamped with a clear organisation and hierarchical structures, leading to scope for appeals in case of the accused or the petitioners not being satisfied with the judgement. Judicial reforms included allowing law education for women, appointment of female law researchers in local courts and allowing for female attorneys in family courts.

Some of the measures taken were aimed at improving the condition of women and providing them better access to education, health care and other social benefits. Steps included issue of individual identity cards to women, establishment of fund for encouraging their economic participation, bringing women education under the umbrella of ministry of education, opening of all subjects for female students and establishment of new all-women universities. The monarchy also took measures to create exclusive economic cities for women, included women in the national dialogue process and awarded leading female professionals in various fields to encourage families to allow girls to pursue a career. Other measures included nomination of women in the *Majlis al-Shura* and making way for their participation in the municipal elections. Similarly, initiatives to mitigate marginalisation of Shias include better education and health care facilities and economic opportunities in Shia concentrated areas such as Hasa and Najran. Housing and residential projects in these areas were undertaken to alleviate the sense of deprivation among Shias.

In addition to the domestic factors, there have been some *external forces* that have played a role in the ‘social reform’ process. One is the pressure for reforms from allies like the United States who in the past were indifferent to demands of the Saudi Society. However, in the aftermath of the 11 September attacks, immense pressure was exerted to rid the school curriculum of offensive remarks against Jews, Christians, Shias and non-believers. It pushed the monarchy to review and revise the school curriculum and text-books but did not make any difference to funding for religious universities and institutions. Another source of external pressure is global media and international human rights organisations that criticise Saudi laws and their discriminatory practices. This has led to some reforms but has also resulted in hardening of stand among conservative sections that see it as an external ‘conspiracy’ or ‘intervention’ in internal matters. Moreover, the monarchy has launched a counter-offensive to improve its global image and this has been welcomed by cross-sections of Saudis. Another external factor that can be seen as playing a role is forces of globalisation. Due to international economic integration and significant external exposure, in addition to easy availability of global products and technology, globalisation has impacted temporal aspects of social life.

The process of ‘social reforms’, however, is more a product of domestic factors and impacts of this are evident on all spheres. Population growth and change in its composition have led to many challenges but improvements in demographic indicators reflect towards a healthy trend. Significant impacts on the tribal social structure had led to formation of class-based social hierarchies and identities based in descent. Social institutions namely family, marriage and kinship have witnessed changes in their nature, characteristics and functions. Families have become nuclear and smaller and marriages – though remain sacrosanct – are delayed and are becoming exogamous including inter-tribal alliances and marriages with non-Saudis. Kinship ties on the other hand play a less important role, than in the past, in social, political and economic spheres and this is more an impact of rapid urbanisation. In the process, a degree change can be noticed in both temporal and religious aspects of life. This validates the first hypothesis, namely, *The Saudi society is changing more due to increased urge from internal reformist elements than its interaction with the outside world.*

A degree of change is visible in the way religion is practiced or in people's attitude towards religion. There is no doubt that the society remains highly religious and people continue to adhere to Islam in their daily lives. All temporal and spiritual aspects of life are guarded by Islam and mosques and other religious institutions continue to occupy centrality in social life. At the same time, Islam has not prevented people from doing things that were previously considered taboo. For example, family planning and organ donation, that continue to attract opposition, have become common place. Similarly, a complete opposition to women's participation in public affairs and jobs have become confined to radical groups. It is indicative of a change in attitude of the people towards religion. Though mosques continue to attract worshippers, this does not prevent people from indulging in activities that were hitherto prohibited such as music, photography, paintings and even cinema. The youth are changing the way religion is practiced leading to Saudi Islam becoming less intrusive in private affairs. Therefore, the second hypothesis, that *Despite Saudi Arabia being a highly religious society, the people's perception towards religion is undergoing a change*, is validated.

Wahhabi ulema in spite of losing their historical pre-eminence continue to be the vanguards against reforms. They continue to have a role in society and politics despite diminishing influence due to them being seen as unconditional supporter of the ruling family. At the same time, many ulema have started to advocate change and do not see a need for the society to be guarded and controlled. For example, a few ulema have advocated women's rights and have questioned the necessity for veiling in public. Nonetheless, these are rare instances and largely ulema advocate status quo and oppose reforms. For example, they are against bringing law to set a minimum age of marriage, oppose any need for physical education in girl's schools, do not want Saudi women to drive and for them cinema is ruinous for the society. They uphold the idea of polygamous marriages and oppose scrapping the archaic guardianship rule. Their opposition to reforms is not confined to women's issues alone but encompasses all spheres including education, judiciary, public administration, morality and even in family life. This opposition acquires extreme manifestations on women's rights and some ulema voice public criticism of the monarchy, a rarity in the Saudi context.

Despite facing numerous challenges, social restrictions and strong opposition from ulema, Saudi women are making a mark in several fields. They are acquiring education, pursuing career and becoming financially independent. The number of women working in various fields such as media, academia, business, entrepreneurship, social activism is increasing. Gender roles are being redefined and even within families women are securing, if not equal status, at least a relationship of mutual respect. Individual women are acquiring leadership positions in various fields, and are leading advocacy groups for women's rights. The monarchy too has taken measures to facilitate better education and employment opportunities for them. Nevertheless, the debate on female empowerment is skewed and does not endorses the idea of 'gender equality' rather articulates the patriarchal notion of 'male-female' partnership. The Wahhabi ulema are staunchly opposed to allowing many rights to women and argue that female participation in public life is 'against nature' and agree to women pursuing education or employment only in a 'segregated public space.' Thus, the third hypothesis – *Women in Saudi Arabia have achieved gains in different fields but face challenges because of the ulema* – stands validated.

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Annexure I

Glossary of Select Arabic Words

‘aaila	clan
‘amm	paternal uncle
abaya	a type of female gown, commonly used in Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries
abd	slave
adhan	Islamic prayer call
ahl	people/group
ahl al-Hal wa al-Aqd	people with binding authority
akh	brother
al-Amr al-Maliki	royal decree
al-Diwan al-Maliki	royal court
al-Hiwar al-Watani	National Dialogue
al-Mufti al-Aam	Grand Mufti
al-Nizam al-Asasi	Basic Law
al-Sahwa al-Islamiya	Islamic awakening
amir	tribal chief
anusa	spinster
Arab al-Areba	Arabised
Arab al-Asl	original Arabs
asabiya	kinship
Ashraf	those claiming direct descent from the Prophet’s family or clan also known as *Sayyid*
Ashura	commemoration of martyrdom of Hussein, son of Fourth Caliph Ali
azza	mourning period for death

badu	Bedouin
balad	country, municipality
bid'ah	innovation in Islamic tenets
bint	daughter
dars	religious sermons
dawah	preaching/proselytising
difa'	defence
diniya	religious
diwaniya	community congregations/meetings (A Persian word used in coastal regions of Arabia)
Emir	head, chief
falsafa	philosophy
Farsi	Persian
fasad	degeneration
fatwa	religious edict/opinion
fiqh	Islamic jurisprudence
fitna	evil
ful	a traditional Saudi dish prepared from chickpeas
ghutra	a square piece of white cloth tied on head by Saudi men
Habshi	African, Ethiopian
hadar	settled, township
hadith	Prophet's sayings/teachings
Hadrami	those belonging to Hadramut region in southern Arabia (currently a part of Yemen)
hai'a	committee
haq (pl. *huquq*)	rights
haraam	prohibited
harka	movement

Hayat al-Badawi	Bedouin life
Hayat al-Hadari	settled life
Hayat al-Rifi	village life
hijab	head scarf for women
Hindi	Indian
hisba	accountability
hizb	party
Hizbullah al-Hijaz	Party of God in Hejaz
hurub	run away; escaped
ibn/bin	son
idarah	directorate
ifta	system of issuing religious edicts
ijma'a	consensus
ijtihad	reasoning
ikhtilat	intermixing
Ikhwan	brothers or brotherhood but refers to the Bedouin religious militia that was instrumental in the formation of third Saudi state
Imam	leader; prayer leader in mosque
iman	faith
Indunesi	Southeast Asian (Indonesian)
infitah	opening
iqal	a braided chord
islah	reform
Ithna Ashari	Twelver Shia
jahannam	hell
jama'a	group
jannah	heaven
jaou	fun

jarida (pl. *jaraid*)	newspaper
jihad	struggle; holy war
jihadi	those who call for holy war for Islamic revival
jiziya	religious/protection tax levied upon non-Muslims
kabir (pl. *kibar*)	senior, big
kabsa	a common Saudi dish prepared of rice and meat
kafala	sponsorship
kafir (pl. *Kuffar*)	non-believer
khal	maternal uncle
kharijiya	external
Khawarij	those who are accused of abandoning Islam
khula	separation, female seeking divorce
kufr	disbelief (renouncing Islam)
kuttab	informal primary schools
madhab	school of thought or jurisprudence
madrasa	school
Mahdi	messiah
mahr	bride price or dowry paid to the bride
mahram	relatives one is not supposed to marry
majalla (pl. *majallat*)	magazine
majlis (pl. *majalis*)	congregation
majlis aam	public congregation
Majlis al-Shura	Consultative Council
Majlis al-Wuzara'	cabinet, council of minsters
majlis dars	religious congregation
majlis khas	private congregation
mara' (pl. *nisa'a*)	woman
Masjid al-Haram	The Mosque surrounding Kaaba in Mecca

Masjid al-Nabawi	Prophet's Mosque in Medina
maslaha	common good; public interest
meharjan	festival
mintaqa (pl. *manatiq*)	province
muezzin	one who recites *adhan* or calls for prayer from mosques
Mufti	jurist
muhafaza (pl. *muhafazat*)	district
muhakama	court
mujaddid	revivalist
mujahid	religious fighter
mushrik	polytheist
muslih	reformer
mutawwa (pl. *mutawwyin*)	members of religious police
Muwahhidun	Unitarians
Nasrani (pl. *Nasara*)	Christian
niqab	face veil for women
Nitaqat	ranges but refers to the policy of Saudization of labour force
nizam	system
qabayali	tribal
qabila (pl. *qabail*)	tribe
qadi	judge
qahwa	café
qiyas	analogy
rajul (pl. *rijal*)	man
riba	interest (banking)
risala (pl. *rasail*)	letter
Sahaba	companions of Prophet Muhammad

Sahwa	awakening
Sahwi	those who belong to the Islamic awakening movement
salaf or *al-Salaf al-Saleh*	the first three generations of Muslims
Salafi	those who renounce *taqlid* and insist on following the *salaf,* the first three generations of muslims
shahada	declaration of faith
shari'a	Islamic law
she'r	verse
Shaikh	surname used by descendants of Wahhab
sheikh	tribal elder; religious preacher
shi'un	affairs
shirk	polytheism
shmagh	a square piece of red-white checked cloth tied on head by Saudi men
shu'ba	section; committee
shura	consultation
siyasa	politics; policy
siyasiya	political
sobyah	a traditional cold-drink prepared with milk, wheat flour and dry fruits
souq	market
Sunnah	Prophetic traditions
taba'in	second generation Muslims who were companions of *Sahaba*
taba' taba'in	third generation Muslims who were companions of *taba'in*
tafkiri	extremist *salafis* who declare other Muslims as unfaithful
taghrib	westernisation

tahjeer	marriage arranged by parents where the girl is married to a close relative at young age
tajdid	renewal
tajir (pl. *tujjar*)	trader
Tamkin al-Mara'	women empowerment
taqlid	following one of the four Sunni jurisprudence
tatweer	development
tawheed	oneness of God
thob	a type of male gown, commonly used in Gulf and other Arab countries
ukht	sister
ulema	religious scholars
umama	turban
umma	community of believers in a non-territorial sense
usrah	family
uulma	globalisation
waqf (pl. *Awqaf*)	Islamic endowment
wasata	links
watan	nation
wikala	agency
wizara	ministry
Yahudi (pl. *Yahud*)	Jews
Yawm al-Qiyamah	Day of Judgement
zakat	compulsory religious tax levied upon Muslims
ziwaj	marriage

Annexure II
Historical Sketch of the three Saudi States

First Saudi state (1744-1818)

Emirate of Dariyah (first Saudi-Wahhabi state) was established in 1744 and soon spread its territorial authority over the whole of Najd and parts of Hejaz. It led to attacks and overthrow of local rulers in different regions of the Peninsula and troops sent by the Emirate reached up to Basrah and Karbala where they indulged in ransacking Shia and Sufi shrines. This compelled the Ottoman Sultan, who held nominal authority over the Arabian Peninsula and the Islamic Holy Places, to assign the ruler of Egypt, Muhammad Ali, to check the tide of the Saudi-Wahhabi alliance. Ali ordered his son Ibrahim to lead an army to fight against the Emirate. The last al-Saud ruler Abdullah bin Saud was captured by Ibrahim's army in 1818, brought to the court of Ottoman Sultan and was executed in Istanbul, the same year. The agricultural settlement of Dariyah from where **Muhammad bin Saud** started his alliance with Muhammad bin Abdul Wahhab was completely destroyed in 1818.

The 74-year period saw the following four rulers:

1. Imam Muhammad bin Saud (1744-1765)
2. Imam Abdulaziz bin Muhammad bin Saud (1765-1803)
3. Imam Saud bin Abdulaziz bin Muhammad bin Saud (1803-1814)
4. Imam Abdullah bin Saud (1814-1818)

Second Saudi State (1824-1891)

The Saudi state was resurrected in 1824 by **Turki bin Abdullah al-Saud**, one of the grandsons of the founder of the first Saudi state Muhammad bin Saud. The Second Saudi State was established by a branch of the sons of founder of First Saudi State. The rule remained mired in internal conflicts and two sons of Turki, the founder, namely, Abdullah and Saud, continuously struggled for power. Mostly the family backed Saud but Abdullah managed to get support from the rulers of Hail who were aligned to the Ottoman and ruled over Hasa and also intermittently over Riyadh. In between, a third

son, Abdulrahman came to power twice first after the death of Saud in 1875 and again in 1889 through support from the sons of Saud. Eventually al-Rashid, who had been engaged in a long rivalry with al-Saud in Najd, defeated Abdulrahman and the latter fled Riyadh, first taking refuge among Murrah nomadic tribes of Rub al-Khali, then among al-Khalifah in Bahrain and finally among the al-Sabah family of Kuwati. Thus, the second state came to an end with the intervention of Ottoman supported al-Rashid family who captured Riyadh and took control of Najd.

The 65-year period saw the following eight rulers:

1. Imam Turki bin Abdullah bin Muhammad bin Saud (1824-1834)
2. Imam Mushari bin Abdulrahman bin Mushari (1834)
3. Imam Faisal bin Turki bin Abdullah (1834-1838) and (1843-1865)
4. Imam Khalid bin Saud bin Abdulaziz bin Muhammad bin Saud (1838-1841)
5. Imam Abdullah bin Thunayyan (1841-1843)
6. Imam Abdullah bin Faisal bin Turki bin Abdullah bin Muhammad bin Saud (1865-1873) and (1876-1889)
7. Imam Saud bin Faisal bin Turki bin Abdulla bin Muhammad bin Saud (1871) (1873-1875)
8. Imam Abdulrahman bin Faisal bin Turki bin Abdullah bin Muhammad bin Saud (1875-76) and (1889-91)

Third Saudi State (1902-till date)

Founder of Third Saudi State is **Abdulaziz bin Abdulrahman al-Saud (Ibn Saud)**. His father was the last ruler of the Second Saudi State and was defeated by the al-Rashid family of Hail in 1891 forcing him to flee to Kuwait. Ibn Saud took over Riyadh in 1902 defeating the al-Rashid family and established the Third Saudi State. He captured large parts of the Peninsula and in 1932 declared the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia**.**

Since 1902, the following seven rulers have ruled the third Saudi state:

1. Abdulaziz bin Abdulrahman bin Faisal bin Turki bin Abdullah bin Muhammad bin Saud (1902-1953)
2. Saud bin Abdulaziz (1953-1964)
3. Faisal bin Abdulaziz (1964-1975)

4. Khalid bin Abdulaziz (1975-1982)
5. Fahd bin Abdulaziz (1982-2005)
6. Abdullah bin Abdulaziz (2005-2015)
7. Salman bin Abdulaziz (2015-)

Source: Shahin, 1997; Umar, 1985.

Annexure III

Line of Succession in al-Saud since 1932

Name	Lifetime	Portfolios Held
Abdul Aziz bin Abdul Rahman (Ibn Saud)	1876-1953	King (1932-53)
Saud bin Abdul Aziz	1902-69	King (1953-64) Crown Prince (1933-53)
Faisal bin Abdual Aziz	1906-75	King (1964-75) Crown Prince (1953-64)
Khalid bin Abdul Aziz	1913-82	King (1975-82) Crown Prince (1965-75)
Fahd bin Abdul Aziz	1921-2005	King (1982-2005) Crown Prince (1975-82) Second Deputy Prime Minister (1967-75)
Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz	1924-2015	King (2005-15) Crown Prince (1982-2005) Second Deputy Prime Minister (1975-82) Chief of National Guard (1962-2012)
Sultan bin Abdul Aziz	1928-2011	Crown Prince (2005-11) Second Deputy Prime Minister (1982-2005) Minister of Defence (1963-2011)
Naif bin Abdul Aziz	1934-2012	Crown Prince (2011-12) Second Deputy Prime Minister (2009-11) Minister of Interior (1975-2012)

Salman bin Abdul Aziz	**1935-**	**King (2015-)** **Crown Prince (2012-15)** **Second Deputy Prime Minister (2011-12)** **Minister of Defence (2011-15)** **Governor of Riyadh (1963-2011)**
Muqrin bin Abdul Aziz	1945-	Crown Prince (January-April 2015) Deputy Crown Prince (March 2014-January 2015) Second Deputy Prime Minister (February 2013-January 2015) Director General, Saudi Intelligence Agency (2005-2012)
Mohammad bin Naif bin Abdul Aziz	1959-	Crown Prince (April 2015-till date) Deputy Crown Prince (January-April 2015) Second Deputy Prime Minister (January-April 2015) Minister of Interior (November 2012-till date)
Mohammad bin Salman bin Abdul Aziz	1985-	Deputy Crown Prince (April 2015-till date) Second Deputy Prime Minister (April 2015-till date) Minister of Defence (January 2015-)

Source: Compiled from various official sources of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.