Shura-Democracy Nexus in the Selected Urdu Tafasir of the Sub-Continent: A Comparative Study*

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ABSTRACT

The concept of Shura (literally mutual consultation)—an explicit injunction occurring three times in the Qur’an (as in Q. 2: 233, 3: 159, and 42: 38)—is one of the basic principles having important implications for social and political theory. In the Tafsir literature, there are diverse views regarding the context, nature, importance and significance of Shura, as a concept and as an institution. Shura is considered as a crucial concept in contemporary Islamic political thought and is seen as a key concept for Islamic governance. It is interpreted, by the Muslim exegetes as well as other scholars, in the light of new socio-politico-cultural contexts, and is considered as having close connections and similarities with democracy (its ideas, values, and institutions) and participatory systems of governance. In a nutshell, Shura is interpreted as a key operational element in the relationship between Islam and democracy, or as the source and basis of ‘Islamic democracy’.

This paper, in this backdrop, attempts to explore the theme of Shura-Democracy Nexus in some Selected Urdu Tafasir of the Sub-Continent, through a comparative study of the relevant verses, viz. Q. 3: 159, and Q. 42: 38. The five (5) Urdu Tafasir selected for this study are: Tarjuman al-Qur’an of Mawlana Abul Kalam Azad (d.1958), Ma’arif al-Qur’an of Mufti Muhammad Shafi (d.1976), Tafsir-i-Qur’an/ Tafsir-i-Majidi of Abdul Majid Daryabadi (d.1977), Tafhim al-Qur’an of Mawlana Syed Abul Ala Mawdudi (d.1979), and Tadabbur al-Qur’an of Amin Ahsan Islahi (d.1997). The objective is to explore how these modern exegetes examine and interpret the concept of Shura, and thus contribute to the theme of Shura-Democracy nexus.

Key Words: Noble Qur’an; Shura; Democracy; Urdu Tafasir; Indo-Pak Mufassirun; Ideological Influence; Contextualist Approach.

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The concept of Shura—generally translated as mutual consultation or the decision-making process of the Muslim community—is an explicit injunction which occurs three (3) times in the Qur’an: as Tashawur in Q. 2: 233, as Shawirhum in Q. 3: 159, and as Shura in Q. 42:38. It is one of the basic principles having important implications for social and political theory. In the tafsir literature, there are diverse views regarding the context, nature, and importance/significance of Shura, both as a concept and as an institution. Shura is considered as a crucial concept in contemporary Islamic political thought and is seen as a key concept for Islamic governance. It is interpreted, by the Muslim exegetes as well as other scholars, in the light of new socio-politico-cultural contexts, and is considered as having close connections and similarities with democracy and the ideas, values, and institutions of democracy and participatory systems of governance. In a nutshell, Shura is interpreted as a key operational element in the relationship between Islam and democracy, or as the source and basis of ‘Islamic democracy’.

In this backdrop, the theme of this paper is to review—through a comparative analysis/examination—the diverse translations/approaches and interpretations of the Qur’anic concept of Shura (with a particular reference to Q. 3: 159 and 42: 38)—by the five (5) prominent Mufassirun of 20th century Sub-Continent. These exegetes are: Mawlana Abul Kalam Azad (d.1958)\(^1\), Mufti Muhammad Shafi (d.1976)\(^2\), Mawlana Syed Abul Ala Mawdudi (d.1979)\(^3\), Mawlana Abdul Majid Daryabadi (d.1977)\(^4\), and Amin Ahsan Islahi (d.1997)\(^5\). The names of their tafsir, respectively, are: Tarjuman al-Qur’an, Ma’arif al Qur’an, Tafhim al-Qur’an, Tafsir-i-Qur’an/ Tafsir-i-Majidi, and Tadabbur-e-Qur’an. It is pertinent to mention here that all these tafsir, originally written in Urdu, have been translated into English as well. It is also noteworthy that among these exegetes, Daryabadi has two tafsir to his credit—one each in Urdu and English—and a summary (talkhis) of his Tafsir, in a single volume, published by the Islamic Foundation, UK, in 2001\(^6\).

[The major aim and objective here is to discuss how Shura (with particular reference to Q. 3: 159 and 42: 38)—a crucial concept in contemporary Islamic political thought—is interpreted, by these selected exegetes of the Sub-Continent in the light of new socio-politico-cultural contexts, and how their (varied) interpretations show its similarity (and differences) with democracy, institutions of democracy, and participatory systems of governance.]

This discussion helps us to know the various approaches—which are in many ways similar but are different from each other as well—of the exegetes on this particular concept. It also highlights the contribution of these five (5) exegetes of the Sub-Continent to the theme of Shura-democracy nexus.
Shura: Text, Context, and Connotation

Shura is derived from the root ‘sh.w.r.’ which has a broad spectrum of meanings including: ‘to consult’, ‘mutual consultation’, ‘opinion’, ‘to express opinions with each other’, ‘consideration’, ‘advice’, ‘counsel’, ‘conference’, and ‘deliberation and discussions with other individuals or groups’, or ‘the decision-making process of the community’. The derivatives of this root occur three (3) times in the Qur’an each in a different form: as ‘Tashawur’/تَشَاوُر (a verbal noun) meaning ‘consultation’ in Surah al-Baqarah (2: 233); as ‘Shawirhum’ (an imperative: wa Shawirhum fi’l Amr/وَشَاوِرْهُمْ فِي الْأَمْر) meaning ‘consult with them’ occurs in Surah -Al-’Imran, (3: 159); and as ‘Shura’ (consultation/mutual consultation: wa Amruhum Shura Baynahum/وَأَمْرُهُمْ شُورَى بِيْنَهُمْ) in Surah al-Shura (42: 38)—the name of this Surah of the Holy Qur’an.

These three attestations and evidences relate to different situations and categories of Muslims. These describe the most important issues of human life, and in the sense of consultation, it has “important implications for social and political theory”. All these instances (especially in Q. 3: 159 and 42: 38) reveal the “social and political dimensions of consultation” as well as demonstrate its inevitability at the individual and collective levels. As noted by, among others, Ahmad Mubarak al-Baghdadi (in the Encyclopedia of the Qur’an) reference in Q. 2: 233 applies particularly “to the potential controversy between two divorced partners concerning the matters of weaning [or giving up of sucking of] an infant”; Q. 3: 159 is a “special text related to the Prophet Muhammad [pbuh] in the shadow of occurrence of battle of ‘Uhud’ in which the Muslims suffered a reverse and nearly lost the battle; and Q. 42: 38 applies “to all Muslims”. Among these, Q. 42: 38 suggests that in true consultation, the view adopted is communal, and the decisions made are shared in common rather than made by a single individual. The verse Q. 3: 159 is viewed as a foundational principle in Islamic government and leadership, and in the relationship between Muslim rulers and their subjects.

These attestations show—as Ahmad al-Raysuni observes in his Al-Shura: The Qur’anic Principle of Consultation—that “Consultation is a necessity in connection with private affairs, including issues pertaining to the individual, the individual in relation to other individuals, between husbands and wives, and parents and their children, and is clearly vital regarding public affairs and the major issues they raise”.

Reading these two verses completely and keeping in view the asbab-i-nazul, what becomes clear is that in 3: 159, Shura as ‘shawirhum’ (plural), literally meaning ‘consult with them’, is a special text related to the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) in the shadow of occurrence of battle of Uhud. This verse gives direct order to Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) to consult believers in the worldly affairs and governmental matters and to respect the opinion of the majority (of them). The verse has been of central interest both to the mufassirun (exegetes/ commentators) and general scholars alike.

In Q: 42: 38, Shura (as mutual consultation/deliberation among themselves) applies “to all Muslims”, as in this verse, Allah praises those Muslims who conduct their affairs through consultation, i.e., one of the best qualities and attributes of true
believers is that they conduct their affairs by mutual consultation. The expression ‘wa amruhum Shura baynahum’ means that in every matter which needs deliberation—whether it belongs to the field of authority and government or other social or communal aspect—the customary practice of the true Muslims is that they work through mutual consultation. Here the term Shura is understood in the context of verses 37-39 of surah 42 as one of a series of attributes of Muslims: they shun/avoid heinous sins and indecencies, forgive when angry, obey the command of their Lord and persevere in Prayer, their rule is to consult one another, spend out of what God provides and, when tyranny affects them, defend themselves.12

In the tafsir literature of classical and pre-modern eras, one comes to know that Shura (consultation) is described and detailed as one of the foremost rule of law in the Islamic system of political administration and social set up. The institution of Shura, the intrinsic component of Islamic Polity, plays a cordial role in the socio-political system as it discusses most important issues of human life. And in the words of Asma Afsaruddin,

The predominant sentiment in the literature is that shura as mutual consultation in various spheres (political-administrative, communal, military, [and] familial) is the preferred and desirable method of resolving matters. In the political realm, it is often considered a duty incumbent on the ruler to confer [deliberate and discuss] with knowledgeable advisors.13

The verses 3: 159 and 42: 38 have been debated significantly, but variably. There has been a substantial debate among Muslim commentators regarding the context and meaning of this command.

On the basis of these Qur’anic injunctions, modern Muslim scholars and theorists (whether traditionalists, modernists/ reformists, or Islamists in orientation) venerate Shura as the example par excellence of Islam’s inherent democratic impulse. Resonating the way to just and consultative power-sharing in contrast to arbitrary despotism (istibdad), the concept of Shura is conflated with modern notions of democracy—and thus it becomes first and foremost key operational concept and element in the relationship between Islam and democracy—or ‘Islamic democracy’. To put in the words of Abdullah Saeed (Australia), in the modern times, Shura is “a central concept in contemporary Muslim political thought” which is seen not only as the “foundation for thinking about governance in an Islamic context”, but is (re)interpreted and regarded as being “very closely connected to the kind of ideas, values, and institutions of democracy and participatory systems of governance” and thus “akin to democracy and democratic institutions”.14 Or as Asma Afsaruddin, in her Contemporary Issues in Islam, puts it, “the principle of shura or consultation, endorsed in the Qur’an as the basis for collective decision-making and administration of public affairs” is generally understood, in the present times, “to provide the conceptual grounding for consultative governance and collective decision-making”.15

Varied Translations and Interpretations of Q. 3: 159 & 42: 38 in the Selected Urdu Tafaseer
In this section, the (varied) translations and interpretations of the five (5) selected Müfsasirun—Azad (d.1958), Shafi (d.1976), Daryabadi (d.1977), Mawdudi (d.1979), and Islahi (d.1997)—related to the Qur’anic verses on ‘Shura’ (Q. 3: 159 and 42: 38) in their respective tafsīr are presented: it reveals both the varied translations and the approaches and influences of these commentators on the translations (both in Urdu and English, as almost all of these exegesis have been rendered into English as well). For example, the verse Q. 3: 159, “wa shawirhum fil amy” is translated/ rendered by them as: 16

1. **Azad**: “nez is tarha ke ma’amlaat main (yeni jung wa aman ke ma’amlaat main) unse mashwra kar liya karo” (‘and consult them in matters of importance [i.e., in matters related to war and peace]’);
2. **Shafi**: “aur mashwara le unse kaam main” (‘and consult them in the matter’);
3. **Daryabadi**: “aur unse ma’amlaat main mashwara letey rahiye” (‘and take counsel with them in the affair’);
4. **Mawdudi**: “aur deen ke kaam main unko sharik-i-mashwara karo” (‘and in matters of religion take mutual consultation from them’);
5. **Islahi**: “aur ma’amlaat main unse mashwara letey raho” (‘take counsel with them in the conduct of affairs’).

And they render Q. 42: 38, “wa amruhum shura baynahum” into Urdu/English as:

1. **Azad**: “aur unko hukm diya ki mashwara kar ke tamaam amuur anjaam dein’ (‘and who conduct their affairs by mutual consultation’);
2. **Shafi**: “aur kaam kartey hain mashwara se aapas ke” (‘and whose affairs are (settled) with consultation between them’);
3. **Daryabadi**: “aur unka (ye aham) kaam bahami Mashwara se hota hai” (‘and whose affair being a matter of counsel among themselves’);
4. **Mawdudi**: “apne ma’amlaat aapas ke mashwary se chalatey hain” (‘the conduct of their affairs is by mutual consultation’);
5. **Islahi**: “aur unka nizam shura par hai” (‘their system is based on mutual consultation’): [For comparison, see Table on next page]
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S. No.</th>
<th>Sura: Verse no.</th>
<th>Translator</th>
<th>Translation(s) in Urdu</th>
<th>English Renderings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1(a)</td>
<td>3:159: “wa shawirhum fil amr”/وشاورہم یں الأمر</td>
<td>Azad</td>
<td>“nez is tarha ke ma’amlaat main (yeni Jung wa aman ke ma’amlaat main) unse mashwara kar liya / معاملات/ مشورہ /”</td>
<td>“and consult them in matters of importance [i.e., in matters related to war and peace]”</td>
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<td>1(b)</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>Shafi</td>
<td>“aur mashwara le unse kaam main” / کام/ مشورہ</td>
<td>“and consult them in the matter”</td>
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<tr>
<td>1(c)</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>Daryabadi</td>
<td>“aur unse ma’amlaat main mashwara letey rahtey” / معاملات / مشورہ</td>
<td>“and take [thou] counsel with them in the affair”</td>
</tr>
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<td>1(d)</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>Mawdudi</td>
<td>“aur deen ke kaam main unko bi shariik-i-mashwara rakho” / کام / شریک مشورہ</td>
<td>“and take counsel with them in the conduct of the affairs”</td>
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<tr>
<td>1(e)</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>Islahi</td>
<td>“aur ma’amlaat main unse mashwara letey raho” / معاملات / مشورہ</td>
<td>“take counsel with them in the conduct of affairs”</td>
</tr>
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<td>2(a)</td>
<td>42:38 “wa amruhum shura haynahum”/وامرہم شوری بنھیں</td>
<td>Azad</td>
<td>“aur unko hukm diya ki mashwara kar ke tamaam anuur sar anjaam dein” / امور / مشورہ</td>
<td>“and who conduct their affairs by mutual consultation”</td>
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<td>2(b)</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>Shafi</td>
<td>“aur kaam kartey hain mashwara se aapas ke” / کام / مشورہ</td>
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<td>2(c)</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>Daryabadi</td>
<td>“Aur Unka (Ye Aham) Kaam Bahani Mashwara Se Hota Hai” / کام / بابی مشورہ</td>
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<td>“their system is based on mutual consultation”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The translations of these two specific verses, by these 5 exegetes/mufasirun, shows that in Q. 3: 159, Shawirhum is translated as Mashwara / مشوره or Sharik-i- Mashwara/شريک مشوره/، and they translate Shura (Q. 42: 38) variedly as Mashwara/ مشوره, Bahami Mashwara/باهمي مشوره / or simply as Shura/ شورى. Similarly, they translate the word Amr/امر (in Q. 3: 159) as Ma’amlat/معاملات, Kaam/کام, and Amruhum (Q. 42: 38) as Amuur/امور, Ma’amlat/معاملات، and Kaam/کام. This is both due to their adoption of ‘contextualist approach’ as well as the result of their varied ‘theological/ ideological orientations’. This becomes more evident by their interpretations the verses under study and at the same time reveals the wide ranging scope of Shura-Democracy nexus in these tafaseer of 20th century Sub-Continent.

Exploring the theme of Shura-Democracy Nexus in the Selected Tafasir

The translations of these two verses clearly reveal the marks of ‘contextualist approach’ as well as the influence of ‘theological/ ideological orientations’ of these Mufasirun. They also bear evidence to the fact that each translation/ commentary of the Noble Qur’an is, at the end, a result of that translator’s own understanding; for it is beyond the comprehension and understanding, capacity and ability, of any person, to translate exactly the holy Qur’an, the Word of Almighty Allah. All the translations and exegesis of the Qur’an are attempts of ‘Translating the Untranslatable’. Thus, it is understood that those who translate the Qur’an had never been able to—nor will anyone in the future—translate its real meaning(s), but they only make attempts and efforts to translate its meanings and what they—on the basis of knowledge, comprehension and understanding and on the basis of guidance from the Sunnah/ Prophetic sayings (ahadith)—understand and comprehend from it. That is why one sees/ observes a variety/ diversity not only in the interpretations but in the translations of the Noble Qur’an as well.

This is clearly evident form the above translations of Q. 3: 159 and 42: 38, and will become more evident in the interpretation(s) of these two verses by the 5 Mufasirun; i.e., their views/ interpretations show the way(s) in which they have approached these verses—and by that way to the Qur’an. All of them agree that in Q. 3: 159, Prophet (pbuh) is commanded/ ordered to take deliberation with or consult his Companions in matters of importance. For example, contextualizing Q. 3: 159 with the situation of battle of Uhud, Abul Kalam Azad asserts that here the Qur’an addresses the Prophet (pbuh) “to draw his attention to the function of leadership” (Mansab-e-Imammat); among them: (i) Your procedure in matters of peace and war should not be decided without consultation (with those who are competent to advise); and (ii) The procedure may take this form: first, hold consultations and then make up your mind to decide on something definite. Once you are resolved in your mind on anything, stick to it with firmness. Consultation at the proper moment is necessary, and resolution at the proper moment is equally necessary. The question of resolution or decision does not arise till the consultation is over. He further adds that it tells Muslims that “when the Prophet (pbuh) takes
counsel of them before deciding on any line of action, it should behove them to obey him implicitly”. 19

For Mufti Muhammad Shafi, the terms like *shura*, *mashwarah*, and *mashawarat* (which literally mean counsel, consultation, and mutual consultation, respectively) all mean “the soliciting of advice and counsel in something that needs deliberation”. 20 For him, the expression ‘*and consult them in the matter*’ (*Q.* 3: 159) means that the Prophet (pbuh) has been commanded “to consult with or seek the advice of his noble Companions” in matters of concern and those needing “deliberation, which include those of authority and government”, so that they are “fully satisfied and emotionally at peace” and thus “will become an act of mollifying grace”. 21 He further adds that *Q.* 3: 159 and 42: 38 collectively “not only highlight the need for consultation very clearly; they also point out to some basic principles of Islam’s system of government, and its constitution. The Islamic government is a government by consultation [*Shuracracy/ Shura-cratic*] in which the *amir* or chief executive is chosen by consultation and definitely not as a matter of family inheritance”. 22 Referring to the then two superpowers, Persian/ Sasanian Empire and Roman/ Byzantine Empire—which were both headed by hereditary emperors and were despotic monarchies based on power/supremacy and not on merit/ability—Shafi asserts that through *Shura*, “Islam demolished the unnatural principle of government through heredity and gave the choice of appointing and dismissing the chief executive to the people”. *Shura* is “a just and natural system”, which later became the “spirit of a system of government” known as democracy. 23

For Amin Ahsan Islahi, in this verse (3: 159) along the guidelines of seeking Allah’s forgiveness, Prophet (pbuh) is advised to consult the *Sahabah* (Companions) in matters requiring deliberation. Regarding the religious matters, Prophet (pbuh) was not in need of consultation as he was guided by Revelation, but in political and administrative matters, Prophet (pbuh) used to consult Companions constantly. In this way, he himself laid the foundations of the *Shurai’yat* (institution of *Shura*) that has been an important feature of the Islamic political system. 24

For Shafi, the expression ‘*wa Shawirhum fi-l Amr*’ (and consult them in the matter) in the present verse means that the Holy Prophet (pbuh) has been commanded to consult with or seek advice of his noble companions in matters that need deliberation, which include those of authority and government; 25 and for Islahi, the matters requiring deliberation mean “the political and administrative matters”, as Prophet (pbuh) used to engage Companions in deliberations on same. 26 Furthermore, for Islahi, the general literary style (*uslub*) of the holy Qur’an is to describe the *Salah* (prayer) along with *Zakah* (poor-duel/ alms tax) or *Infaq* (to spend in the way of God). But here, contrary to this, the Qur’an has adopted a distinctive approach of illustration by mentioning *Shura* in between the two fundamentals of Islam—*Salah* and *Zakah*—which demonstrates the significance of the institution of *Shura* in social life. 27 This view-point is also shared by Daryabadi saying that the mention of *Shura* (in *Q.* 42: 38) in between the two fundamentals of Islam—*Salah* and *Zakah*—demonstrates its significance, and at the collective level it stands for the “consultative government—same as was during the Khulafa-i- Rashidun period”. 28 However, it does not mean (for example as pointed out Prof. M. Y. Faruqi) that the *Shura* is one of the pillars of Islam; however, the style of its
description provides ample evidence of its special importance in the Islamic polity.  

Similarly, sharing the related view-point, Daryabadi and Azad are of the opinion that Q. 3: 159 refers to take counsel in the important affairs of the community, such as peace and war. But Daryabadi goes even further to say that it denotes the “essentially democratic character of the commonwealth of Islam”. For him, in this verse, the Islamic political system, one of the fundamental basis of which is being consultative, is different both from despotic as well as (secular) democratic system. Here it is pertinent to mention that Mawdudi does not make any comments on Q. 3: 159, and has made a detailed discussion on Shura and its various dimensions in Q. 42: 38, which is highly political.

Almost all of them have made a detailed and meticulous discussion, in their Tafasir, on the verse Q. 42: 38, and shared almost the same opinion that it applies “to all Muslims”. In this verse, Allah praises those Muslims who conduct their affairs through consultation, i.e. it’s one of the best qualities and attributes of true believers is that in every matter which needs deliberation—whether related to the field of authority and government or to social aspect—they work through mutual consultation.

For example, in the explanation of Q. 42: 38, Azad, who identifies the compatibility between democracy and community deliberation and consultation (Shura), writes:

“To take consultation or deliberation from each other is one of the best qualities of Muslims mentioned in this verse and Prophet (pbuh) is commanded to take consultation from the Companions in 3: 159 [and consult with them (Shawirhum) in the affairs]. Except Obligatory Commandments [Ahkam–i-Mansusa], Prophet (pbuh) himself used to consult with his noble Companions on every matter related to state and administration [Masaleh Mulki]. Later Shura was made into the very foundations of [the government of the] Pious Caliphate period [r. 632-60CE], and Abu Bakr [the first caliph; r. 632-34 CE] was nominated/selected under the same procedure. This proves that Islamic social order (Nizam-i-Ijtima’i) is a pillar of Islamic way of life, having peculiar importance in it. “

However, he also cautions here that there are some basic/fundamental differences between modern democracy and Islamic Shura System, and further adds that “in modern democracy, the elected representatives have wide authority role/rights in legislation; but in Islam, the Caliph has no authority to intervene (or take consultation) in matters wherein there are clear guidelines in the Islamic sources (nassus). He has the right to take consultation only in matters—which he confronts—about which there are no clear injunctions in the Qur’an and Sunnah; and it is only here that the ‘Consultative Council’ is authoritative to decide”. It is noteworthy to mention here that this view is also shared by Mufti Shabbir Ahmad ‘Uthmani (d. 1949), in his tafsir, Qur’an Majeed.

Mawdudi’s approach to Q. 42: 38 is highly political, as he interprets
Mashawarat (on the basis of both verses: \(Q.3: 159\) and \(42: 38\)) as being “an important pillar of the Islamic way of life”, which is obligatory for the Muslim Ummah, and “to conduct the affairs of collective life without consultation is not only the way of ignorance but also an express violation of the law prescribed by Allah.”  

It is pertinent to mention here that Mawdudi interpreted the concept of Khilafah as the basis of democracy in Islam, and criticized Western (secular) democracy as well. What is more pertinent to mention is that he is the only scholar among his contemporaries who utilized the concept of Khilafah as a basis for the interpretation of democracy in Islam, while others focused on Shura.

To describe this alternate view, Mawdudi coined the term theo-democracy (a divine democratic government): “If I were permitted to coin a new term, I would describe the system of government as a ‘theo-democracy’, that is to say a divine democratic government, because under it the Muslims have been given a limited popular sovereignty under the suzerainty [paramount sovereignty] of God” (italics added). Mawdudi called this a ‘theo-democracy’ in order to distinguish it from a theocracy (or a clergy-run state) and from the Western secular democracy as well, both of which he rejected, and criticized. Elaborating it, Dr. Israr Ahmed, says ‘By coining the term ‘theo-democracy’, Mawdudi has emphasized the point that the “Islamic political system is neither a pure theocracy nor a full-fledged Western style democracy, but that it has elements of both”.

Mawdudi has made a detailed discussion on this verse \((Q.42: 38)\) and considered mashawarat as obligatory on the Muslim community due to these three (3) reasons: (i) the decision of one person according to his/ her own opinion is injustice when the interests of many are concerned; (ii) arbitrary action is morally detestable, as it is only the result of felt superiority or usurping of others’ rights; and (iii) deciding in matters of common interest is a grave responsibility, so consultation is needed to share the burden. “A deep consideration of these three things”, he further elaborates, “can enable one to fully understand that consultation is a necessary demand of the morality that Islam has taught to man, and departure from it is a grave immorality”. He also indicates that Shura extends beyond government and should permeate all aspects of Muslim life: ranging from the domestic affair, family, tribe/ city, to nation. He criticizes, specifically, the act of obtaining power by force or deception as being un-Islamic.

He further points out that the principle of consultation as enshrined in ‘amruhum shura baynahum’ by its very nature and structure \((Naw’iyat wa Fitrat)\) demands five things, which are: (1) collective decision making, that is, “people whose interests and rights are directly affected by collective decisions should have the absolute right to express their opinions” (i.e., there should be freedom of opinion and freedom of information); (2) that the appointment of the person responsible for the collective affairs [Representatives] of the Muslims should be with the free will of people”; (3) that representatives of people involved in consultation with the head of the state should be appointed on the basis of the “genuine trust of people”; (4) that there should be freedom of expression for people’s representatives to present their opinions correctly and honestly; and finally (5) the unanimous or majority verdict of the consultative body should be accepted.
Thus, for him, the implication of this verse is that Muslims can consult in order to come up with the most correct ruling in legal matters, but not give independent judgment in settled matters. Therefore, consultation and deliberation should be done in all collective matters of *Ummah*.

Islahi translates/interprets *Shura* here as ‘*their system is based on mutual consultation*’, which, for him, indicates that “the socio-political system of Muslims should be based on mutual consultation, and not on stubbornness, monarchy, family monopoly/social prestige, and tribal lineage”. Similarly, for Daryabadi, at collective level, *Shura* here stands for consultative government—same as was during the Khulafa-i-Rashidun period.

Thus, *Shura* is interpreted by them—and majority of the present-day scholars do so with more rigor—both in the historical context with examples from the Prophetic and Pious Caliphate period as well as with modern re-interpretations so that to present it as “a *key operational element in the relationship between Islam and democracy*” as well as to make the efforts for the transition from listing “*democratic doctrines of Islam*” to creating and forming “coherent theories and structures of Islamic democracy that are not simply reformulations of Western perceptions in some Muslim idiom” (Italics added).

**Similarities and Differences in Interpretation(s) of *Shura*: A (Brief) Comparison**

From their translation(s) and by their interpretation(s) and their approaches, it becomes clear that Islahi and Shafi approach the concept of the *Shura* from the *etymological* and *linguistic* point of view; while Shafi also refers to this concept *vis-à-vis* democracy, showing that, although a traditional Deobandi scholar and juridical exegete/mufassir, he tackles with the modern issues as well. Also, he translates the verses related to *shura* in the same vein, and emphasizes on this concept from both perspectives—classical as well as modern.

Similarly, Islahi, who also authored a book on “*Islamic State*” wherein he has provided details on the concept of *Shura* and its functioning during Prophetic (610-632) and Pious Caliphate period (632-660 CE)—approaches this concept from the *socio-political angle*: he emphasizes its importance from the social/communal point of view, and form the political angle, thereby arguing that it is the main source and the very basis of *Shura-cracy/shuraiyat* in Islam.

Moreover, Mawdudi and Azad also take their own approaches: while Azad has in brief mentioned about it but he regards it as the real foundation of Islamic socio-political system and extols this concept that has “peculiar importance in Islam”. Azad also speaks of *Shura* both in terms of “war and peace”, as becomes clear from his very translation of this verse, and as the basis of “Islamic democracy”—or what he calls “the real basis of democracy in Islam”, and even goes further to argue that: “Qur’an uses the term *Shura* for describing it [the real democracy] and what else term (other than *Shura*) can we use for describing it”. Almost similar approach is offered by Daryabadi.

Mawdudi, unlike them, emphasized on 42: 38 only but in “political terms”; and while others have given importance, speaking from the political point of view, to 3: 159, in which *Shura* occurs as a command, Mawdudi emphasized on the verse
42: 38. Also noteworthy is that only Shafi has discussed 42: 38 in political terms while others have just simply pointed out that it is one of the main traits of Muslims; so here both are similar but distinct from others.

Also, much noteworthy and striking is the point that while almost all the exegetes and other scholars have emphasized on the concept of Shura, speaking in modern terminology/phraseology, as the basis of democracy in Islam (or as the main source of democratic ethics in Islam) Mawdudi is the only scholar who interpreted Khilafah as the basis of democracy in Islam and coined the term “theo-democracy” for it. Thus, it demonstrates the diversity and variety of approaches that these exegetes have adopted while translating and interpreting the Holy Qur’an.

From this brief comparison, what becomes evident is that there are some common points in their interpretations as well, which are:

(i) They interpret Shura in historical and contextual milieu;
(ii) They (re) interpret Shura in the modern context;
(iii) All of them consider Shura as an important feature of Islamic socio-political system; and
(iv) All of them stress that basis of Shura-cracy (Shurai’yat) was laid by the Prophet (pbuh) himself, and that the foundation of Pious Caliphate was laid on Shura.

Thus, these similarities and differences in the interpretations (of Q. 3: 159 and 42: 38), by these five exegetes (muṣasirun), demonstrate the diversity and variety of approaches that they have adopted while translating and interpreting the Holy Qur’an and while meeting the challenges of modern times. They also demonstrate that since the 20th century, the general trend is to interpret Shura in the light of new social, political and cultural contexts. Muslim exegetes and intellectuals have been slowly but surely reinterpreting the concept of Shura—to use the lexis of Abdullah Saeed—not only as being “akin to democracy and democratic institutions” but also “very closely connected to the kind of ideas, values, and institutions of democracy and participatory systems of governance” as well (Italics added).46

Summarizing these varied translations and different interpretations of these five commentators of Sub-Continent on the concept of Shura, it becomes evident that:

(i) All of them have approached the concept of Shura in different perspectives as per their own theological and ideological orientation(s), which has resulted in diversity and multiplicity of translations of the verses. There is no concordance and agreement between their views (although, as such, there are many similarities) as they interpret and translate the verses, 3: 159 and 42: 38, in different contexts—from traditionalist to modernist, from linguistic/thematic aspect to socio-political/contemporary approach—and keeping in view the nazm, asbab-i-nazul, and the practice of the Prophet (pbuh) as well.
(ii) They have not been able to come to an agreed and established conclusion whether, all in all, Shura is obligatory or just recommendatory: on the
basis of 3: 159, where it occurs in command form, they regard Shura as obligatory; and on the basis of 42: 38, it is recommendatory. But it becomes clear that those who approach it from political angle, which is done by most of them, they regard Shura as an important and obligatory duty for the leader.

(iii) Shura has been (re)interpreted from the “political” angle and from the last few decades, has been regarded and discussed as the alternate as well as an important “operational key concept” for describing democracy in Islam. And all these exegetes have approached the concept from this perspective as well: whether they are traditionalist like Shafi or modernists like Mawdudi, or others. Islahi and Mawdudi, who wrote separate books on “Islamic State” as well, have described this concept as the basis of “Shuraiyat” in Islamic polity.

(iv) Shura has been translated and interpreted in various ways, variedly and differently, thus making it an “issue” and subject of concern and as there are no guidelines about the form, structure, and other related details of this concept, no mufassir has tackled with this issue. e.g., Azad, regarding structure/ form of Shura, says: “It needs more discussion”/Ye Masla Tafseel Talb Hai (thus avoids the issue); similarly Islahi says, for details see my book (and here he discusses Shura under Khualfa-i-Rashidun).

From these points it becomes clear that Shura has remained a “contested” concept, and thus a number of questions and issues are still unanswered—which are not new, but are centuries old—and range from the nature, scope and necessity of application of Shura, to the procedure for the selection/ election of Shura members. So the need of the hour is to address the below issues/questions:

- What is the scope/ necessity of application of Shura?
- Is Shura Obligatory or Recommended?
- Are results of Shura process binding or non-binding?
- What is the procedure for the selection/ election of Counsellors? And many other related issues—which are not new, but are centuries old.
CONCLUSION

The above discussion, thus, reveals that the concept of Shura is directly introduced in the Qur’an, and Muslim exegetes, especially of modern period, have explored it in detail. It plays an amiable role in the socio-political system as it discusses the most important issues of human life. For Muslim Ummah, Shura is the preferred and desirable method of resolving matters of all walks of life—whether social, communal, or political. Moreover, it also becomes clear that since the 20th century, Muslims have been slowly but surely reinterpreting the concept of Shura as being akin to democracy and democratic values and ideas.

The preceding discussion also reveals that attitudes towards Shura—in the Tafsir literature of the Sub-Continent—exist in a wide variety, which range, in Abdullah Saeed’s lexis, “from hostility to the notion of democracy to caution to the assertion that Shura and democracy are compatible”: while some have argued “for a return to pre-modern understanding of Shura”, others are providing “a new and quite different understanding of Shura by equating it with democracy”, and many others have “identified a degree of crossover between the values of Shura with those of democracy”. But, among these trends, the dominant trend—from the final decades of last century—consists of the reformist Muslim thinkers, who are “working toward a new interpretation of shura that is in line with contemporary understanding of what is acceptable in the governance of Muslim states”.

It is also noteworthy to mention, and thus apt to conclude—that in his Reading the Qur’an in the Twenty-First Century, Abdullah Saeed in a special chapter on “Shura and democracy”, concludes that the modern interpretations of ‘Shura as democracy’ demonstrate that since the 20th century, the general trend is to interpret Shura in the light of new social, political and cultural contexts. Muslim exegetes and intellectuals “have been slowly but surely reinterpreting the concept of Shura as being [not only] akin to democracy and democratic institutions” but is “very closely connected to the kind of ideas, values, and institutions of democracy and participatory systems of governance” as well.
NOTES & REFERENCES

1 For details, see, Mawlana Abul Kalam Azad, Tarjuman al-Qur’an, 3 vols. (Lahore: Islami Academy, n.d.); Idem., The Tarjuman al-Qur’an, 5 Vols. (Edited and Trans.), Syed Abdul Latif (Hyderabad: Dr Syed Abdul Latif Trust for Qur’anic Cultural Research, 1962-78; New Delhi: Sahita Academy, 1966) [hereafter abbreviated as Azad, Tj.Q (Urdu); Azad, TTQ (Eng.)]

2 For details, see, Mufti Muhammad Shafi, Ma’ariful Qur’an, (English Trans.) Muhammad Shamim (New Delhi: Farid Book Depot, 2008) [hereafter abbreviated as Shafi, MQ]

3 For details, see, Mawlana Abul Ala Mawdudi, Tafhim al-Qur’an/ “Towards Understanding the Qur’an” [English translation Zafar Ishaq Annsari, assisted by A R Kidwai], (Markfield, Leices., London: Islamic Foundation, 1989; also published and reprinted in New Delhi by Markazi Maktaba Islami Publishers, 1999) [hereafter abbreviated as Mawdudi, Tf.Q]. Its English version (S. A. A. Mawdudi, Tafhim al-Qur’an—The Meaning of the Qur’an) is also available online at www.englishtafsir.com


5 For details, see Amin Ahsan Islahi, Tadabbur al-Qur’an (Delhi: Taj Company, 1989) [hereafter abbreviated as Islahi, Td.Q]

6 For details, see Maulana Abdul Majid Daryabadi, The Glorious Qur’an: Text, Translation, and Commentary (Leicester, Mark.: The Islamic Foundation, 2001) [hereafter abbreviated as Daryabadi, GQ];


8 These verses read as: “and if they decide on weaning, by mutual consent, and after due consultation, there is no sin on them” (2: 233); “and consult with them in the affairs. Then when you have taken a decision, put your trust in Allah” (3: 159); and “and who conduct their affairs by mutual consultation”

9 Al-Baghdadi, “Consultation”, in EQ, 1: 407
10 Al-Baghdadi, “Consultation”, in EQ, 1: 407
12 These verses read as: “What you have been given is only the fleeting enjoyment of his world. Far better and more lasting is what God will give to those who believe and trust in their Lord; who shun great sins and gross indecencies; who forgive when they are angry; respond to their Lord; keep up the prayer; conduct their affairs by mutual consultation; give to others out of what We have provided for them; and defend themselves when they are oppressed” (Q. 42: 36-39)
16 My major previous publication on this theme is Tauseef Ahmad Parray, “Text, Tradition, and Interpretations of Shura: A Study of the views of Modern Indo-Pak Mufassirun (Exegetes)”, Hamdard Islamicus (Karachi, Pakistan), Vol. xxxiv [34], No. 3, July-Sep 2011, pp. 7-22. It includes the views of all the mufassirun studied here excluding Daryabadi (but includes Mufti Shabbir Ahmad ‘Uthmani).
17 For details, see, Azad, Tj.Q & TTQ; Shafi, MQ; Mawdudi, Tf.Q; Islahi, Td.Q; Daryabadi, GQ & TM
18 This phrase is taken from Abdur Raheem Kidwai, Translating the Untranslatable: A Critical Guide to 60 English Translations of the Quran (New Delhi: Sarup Publishers, 2011)
20 Shafi’, MQ, 2: 227. References are made from the English version.
21 Shafi, MQ, 2: 226
22 Shafi, MQ, 2: 233
23 Shafi, *MQ*, 2: 233-34
24 Islahi, *Td.Q*, 2: 208-09
25 Shafi, *MQ*, 2: 227
26 Islahi, *Td.Q*, 2: 202, 208
28 Daryabadi, *TM*, fn. 43, p. 974 (Urdu)
30 Daryabadi, *GQ*, fn. 239, p. 146; Daryabadi, *TM*, fn. 300 & 301, 1: 280 (Eng)
35 Mawdudi, *Tj.Q*, 4: 508-510, fn. 61, esp. p. 508 (Eng. version: fn. 61, pp. 548-51, esp. p. 508); English version is also available online at www.englishtafsir.com/Quran/42/index.html. Here references are provided both from the original Urdu and English versions.
40 Mawdudi, *Tj.Q*, 4: 509
42 Islahi, Td.Q, 7: 179
46 Saeed, Reading the Qur’an, p. 157
47 See, Saeed, Reading the Qur’an, p. 156
48 Saeed, Reading the Qur’an, p. 156
49 See, Chapter 13, “Shura and democracy” in Saeed, Reading the Qur’an, pp. 156-57