Research in Public Administration: An Islamic Perspective[*]

Introduction

This paper deals with three important phenomena of organized social life. These are 'research', 'public administration', and 'Islam'. The former two are human innovation, and the latter is a code of behavior based on revelation as demonstrated by the Messenger of the Almighty Lord of the universe. Sufficient literature is available on research and public administration as activities or processes to achieve definite goals. But Islamic perspectives into these two phenomena are scattered. They have not yet been developed as an organized body of knowledge. Materials on these topics are scattered throughout the *Qur'an*, the *Sunnah* and historical documents. However, an exploratory approach has been adopted in this paper to present Islamic perspectives of both public administration and research methodology. Accordingly, the paper is organized into five main sections excluding this introductory note. The first section includes conceptual clarifications of the three important phenomena of organized social life, i.e., research, public administration, and Islam. The second section brings to light the extent and nature of public administration research and its impacts on concept and institution building to ensure good governance in the state. The next section presents the basic features of different models of public administration that have been evolved overtime and their corresponding units of analysis. The present state of public administration in the Muslim world has been highlighted in section four. Finally, the challenges before Islamic scholars has been discussed in the concluding section.

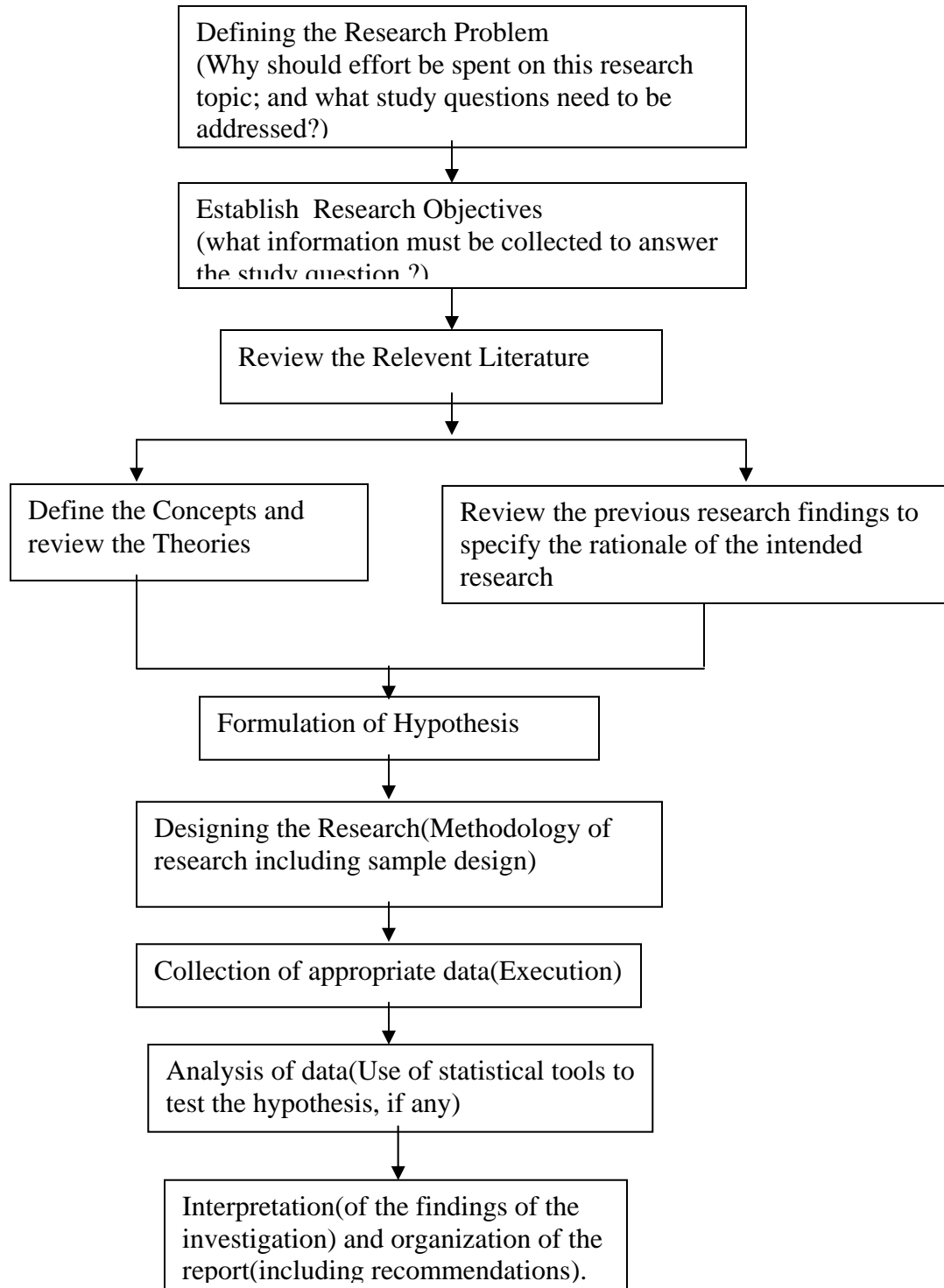## I. Conceptual Clarifications

Research

'Research' means process of systematically acquiring, processing and interpreting data to answer a question or solve a problem. It is an important skill required of all social scientists. 'Research methodology' refers to the steps involved in acquiring the information. The goals that guide all research have been identified as to: (i) describe some event, thing or phenomenon;

(ii) provide for greater understanding of the phenomena and explain how variables are related; and (iii) predict future behavior or events based on observed changes in existing conditions (McNabb, 2005: 6).

The first activity in researching the scientific way is the recognition of a problem. The researcher may then formulate a hypothesis. These are tentative explanations of a situation or interpretation of variables or a relationship or cause and effect perception of a situation. The researcher may either employ inductive reasoning(which means moving from specific to the general) or deductive reasoning(means moving from the general to the specific) in drawing various conclusions. A systematic way of conducting research in social science is depicted in Figure-1.

Figure-1
The Systematic Way of Conducting Social Science Research

Defining the Research Problem
(Why should effort be spent on this research topic; and what study questions need to be addressed?)

Establish Research Objectives
(what information must be collected to answer the study question ?)

Review the Relevent Literature

Define the Concepts and review the Theories

Review the previous research findings to specify the rationale of the intended research

Formulation of Hypothesis

Designing the Research(Methodology of research including sample design)

Collection of appropriate data(Execution)

Analysis of data(Use of statistical tools to test the hypothesis, if any)

Interpretation(of the findings of the investigation) and organization of the report(including recommendations).

Research is the rich tradition of the Islamic scholars who, inspired by the *Qur'ani*c assertion that: "*do not pursue anything of which thou hast no knowledge*"(17:36)), have innovated 'experimental research' during the golden era of Islamic governance.To understand the basic principles behind all the creations of the universe, the *Qur'an* provides ideological motivation for the study of natural phenomena and pursuit of empirical study. About 750 verses or one-eighth of the *Qur'an* is devoted to encouraging men to observe, think and use their intelligence in finding out the facts and laws of nature as indicated by the repeated use of the words:*Tadabbur* (observation), *Tabassur* (understanding) and *Tafakkur* (rationalization). The Holy *Qur'an* says that He has created everything between the sky and the earth for mankind(2:29;15:19-20;31:20) and there are signs for believers in it(2:164;3:190-191).All scientific knowledge have come from the study of natural phenomena and leads to conquer the forces of nature. Those nations who have done this successfully, have been vouchsafed with abundance. Almighty Lord has promised that : "*wamai yutiya al-Hikmah fa qad utia khairan kasi'ra*"(*Al-Qur'an*,2:269),that is to say,those who have been granted the knowledge of science and technology, are indeed, granted abundant good. Modern scientific methods of research may equally be applied in any Islamic search except in areas which contradic the basic foundation or principles of Islam such as the existence of God, *Tawhid*,(final) Day of Judgement or the prohibition of usury, alcohol, gambling, adultery etc. Besides basic research, Islam encourages to undertake research in areas to prove Islamic ideals of accepting what it approves and rejecting what it does not approve or the benefits of Islamic *Sha'ria.*

Islam

'*Islam'* is the combination of a belief in Almighty Allah(*STA*) as the creator and sustainer of the universe and a framework of life based on the total submission to His authority and the guidance of Prophet Muhammad(*SM*).The Messages of Allah(*STA*) as contained in the Holy *Qur'an* together with the Prophetic *Sunnah*(words and deeds of Prophet Muhammad,*SM*), formed the basic codes or guidelines for the whole of mankind in their drive towards a just and welfare society. In the revealed *Qur'an*, it is said that God has created men as His *Khalifa*(vicegerent) on earth(2:39;35:39). As His vicegerent on earth, men's mission is to establish *Adle*(justice) and *Ihsan*(welfare) in the mutual exchange relationship of social life. Allah(*STA*) says:

" *Say!O, Children of Adam!...My Lord hath commanded*
justice"(7:29); and
"O David! We indeed, make thou a vicegerent on earth: so
judge thou between men in truth(and justice); nor follow
thou the Lusts(of the heart), for they will mislead thee from
the path of God"(28:26).

It has further been stated that God has from time to time, sent His Messengers with Scriptures(the criterion of right and wrong) so that mankind may observe justice(*Sura Hadit*,57:25).The *Qur'an* extends the concept of justice further and asks people to look beyond *Adle*(justice),which is *Ihsan*(welfare). Allah(*STA*) says:

"God commands justice, the doing of good and liberality to
kith and kin, and He forbids all shameful deeds, and
injustice and rebellion. He instructs you that ye may
receive admonition"(16:90); and

> *"You are the best of peoples,evolved for (the welfare of)*
> *mankind; enjoying what is right, forbidding what is*
> *wrong, and believing in Allah"*(3:110).

Thus *Adle*(ensuring everybody his due) and *Ihsa*n(welfare of mankind) are the twin objectives of Islam those are to be realized through the efficient conduct of public administration in an Islamic society. As the head of the Islamic state in Madina*, Khalifa* Ali(*RTA*) in his administrative policy letter addressed to his newly appointed Governor of Egypt said,"...I beseak Allah to grant you and me to remain firm in His guidance. Keeping always before us His will and satisfaction of His people for our deeds so that by our just and benevolent rule and ever increasing prosperity and welfare of the state, we may leave behind precedence which may serve in time to come as examples all over the world"(Alam,1976:27).

Public Administration

'Public Administration' is the hierarchically organized body of government officials who work through fixed rules and procedure to realize governmental objectives as expressed in policies and programmes. It is a sub-system of the greater political system of a nation. In a welfare state, it is considered as a mechanism to deliver goods and services to the citizenry.

The traditional concern of public administration is to ensure 'efficiency' and 'economy' in policy implementation. It is a value neutral process consisting of certain activities like POLE(Planning, Organizing, Leading and Controlling) through which inputs received from environment are converted into outputs. All research in public administration are, therefore, directed towards ensuring its efficiency, effectiveness and economy.

In an Islamic society, the goal of every sub-system is to evolve an Islamic framework of life. If development means change—change towards desired direction, then the goal of development in Islam, is the movement away from non-Islam toward Islam.In the political realm as well as in the socio-economic sphere, the goal of Islam is to attain Islamic ideals .Likewise, in Islamic administration, the goal is to maximise Islamic values of humanism of which *Adle* and *Ihsan* are important considerations..

II. Research in Public Administration

Public administration has got two usages. It is used to delineate an area of intellectual enquiry, a discipline or a subject of study; as well as a process or activities—that of administering public affairs (Waldo,1965:3). Some form of administration as a process was prevalent since the begining of human civilization. Since ancient time, administration has attracted the attention of scholars—Aristotle's *Politics,* Kautilya's *Arthasastra*, ,Confucious philosophy, Machiavelli's *Prince,* Hazrat Ali's *Classical Administrative Policy Letter*,Nizam-ul-Mulk's *Siasatnama*,Al-Ghazali's *Counsil for Kings*,Abul Fazal's *Ain-i-Akbari* etc., are rich with valuable views regarding government and administration. But as an academic discipline, public administration is a new innovation. It was Woodrow Wilson(later President of the United States) who set the tone for its systematic study in late 19th century.In an article titled,"The Study of Administration" , published in the *Political Science Quarterly* in 1887, Wilson observed

that "it is getting harder to run a constitution than to frame one", and advocated for its study for efficient management of the statecraft. Since then, public administration has developed as a separate subject of study in the American universities. In Europe, this subject is still being studied as extended part of political science.

In Bangladesh, the subject was first introduced at Dhaka University as a sub-field of political science during late sixties of the last century. In the post-independent period, a new Department of Public Administration was created in Dhaka University in 1972. At present, six public universities in Bangladesh offer public administration courses both at undergraduate and post-graduate levels structured within independent academic departments. Besides, there are many training institutes where government officials are imparted theoretical training in public administration. Time has come to enrich this subject as well as improve our government administration through study and research.

The study of public administration is the science that contributes to the growth of knowledge about the institutions, behaviors and groups that make up and influence the world of administration. It is one of the social science subjects. The research that takes place in the discipline helps us to learn about administrative system and the behavior of the public bureaucracy. Public administration research in any country faces an almost unlimited number of research questions toward which investigative activities may be directed. Some of these are as follows:

1. Efficiency, effectiveness and economy in public sector management;
2. Employee's satisfaction and productivity;
3. Bureaucratic dysfunctions;
4. Administrative reforms;
5. Administrative accountability;
6. Administrative corruption;
7. Decentralization and people's participation; and
8. Local government etc.

Besides these, research may also be undertaken in some broader areas like:

1. Philosophical framework of public administration;
2. Public policy analysis;
3. Administrative rationality;
4. Administrative behavior;
5. Public interest;
6. Administrative ethics; and
7. Public choice.

Since public administration is a new discipline in the academic arena(considered a 'break-away' subject from political science), its theoretical foundation and the methodology of research have not yet been properly developed. The subject did not make much headway in the direction of consolidating its intellectual autonomy as an independent subject of enquiry. However, since it is a social science subject, the research methods that are being widely used in social science study, may also be conveniently adopted in public administration research. Some of these methods are:

1. Case study method;
2. Survey method;
3. Observation method;
4. Historical method;
5. Content analysis method;
6. Model building method;
7. Scenario building method;and
8. Force field analysis method.

Most of the research on public administration that have been undertaken in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh are descriptive in nature. These are limited attempts to problem analysis without sound theoretical framework. The models of public administration grown, nurtured and developed on the basis of Western experience, have simply been imitated without verification of their relevance to developing or Muslim country's systems, culture and environment. As a result, they could not produce the same result in developing societies because of the subject's lack of indigenous identity. F.W. Riggs(1964) made a study on Philippine public administration in mid-sixties of the twentieth century and ultimately came out with his "Prismatic-Sala" model to describe indigenous nature of public administration in the developing countries. Syed Giasuddin Ahmed's(1986) schema of "Public Personnel Agency" may also be used for analyzing the public personnel system of the British commonwealth countries of South Asia.

III. Paradigm Shift in Public Administration Research

Since Public Administration is an evolving discipline, a remarkable paradigmatic change is being observed in its study and research during the last fifty years. At least five different models have been developed during this time. A brief comparative picture of these models has been presented in Table-1.

Table-1
Five Different Models of Public Administration

Models (Theories and Theorists)	Units of Analysis(Empirical Focus)	Characteristics	Values to be Maximised
1.Classical Bureaucratic Model(Taylor,Wilson,Weber,Gulick,Urwick).	=The organization =The government agency =The work group	=Structures =Hierarchy =Authority =Merit appointment =Unity of command	=Efficiency =Economy =Effectiveness
2. New-bureaucratic Model(Simon,March,Cyert,Gore).	=The decision	=Logical- positivist =Cybernetics =Operation research =Systems analysis	=Rationality =Efficiency =Economy =Productivity
3.Institutional Model(Lindbloom,Thompson,Crozier,Downs,Mosher,Etzioni,Blau,Riggs, ,Selznick)	=Rational decision-making =Organizational behavior =Individual behavior	=Empirical =Bureaucratic behavior =Rationality =Power	=Science =Neutral analysis of organizational behavior =Incrementalism
4. Human Relations Model(Mayo,McGregor,Likert,Bennis,Aergyris)	=The individual and work group	=Interpersonal and inter-group relations. =Motivation =Shared authority	=Worker satisfaction =Personal growth =Individual dignity
5. Public Choice Model(Ostrom,Buchanan,Tullock, Niskanan)	=Organization-client relations and public goods distribution =Public sector as market =Leadership and good distribution =Performance contracting	=Anti-bureaucratic =Application of economic logic to problems of public service distribution =Highly analytical =Market analogues =Contracts =Decentralization	=Citizen's option or choice =Equal access to services =Competition

Source: H.George Frederickson, *New Public Administration*(Alabama:Alabama University Press,1980),p.18-19.

It becomes clear from the above Table that there are controversy among scholars regarding the ultimate value to be achieved in public administration. Regarding the units of analysis, different scholars have decided differently. As the society changes, the values of public administration also changes in order to cope with social reactions as we see in New Public Administration Movement(NPM).Till late sixties of the last century, the study of public administration as applied subject was considered value free. Its main

concern was how to ensure 'efficiency' and 'economy' in policy implementation. A new dimension has been added in public administration study from the early 1970s by some young public administration scholars.They asked for qualitative changes in the outlook, orientation and behavior of public administrators. They argued that as practical management of personnel and resources, public administration cannot be value free. They emphasized that public administration activities should evolve around some basic values like ' social justice', 'representativeness', 'citizen's participation' and 'public choice' etc(Marini,1971).These young scholars have called for a new public administration to stress the "equity" point of view in the administrative process. The group became disinclined to examine efficiency, economy and administrative techniques—the traditional concern. They raised normative issues instead: who benefits? Should the goods and services of the state be more equitably distributed ? To answer these questions, one might also ask the questions of 'by whom','for whom' and' how' in public administratiuon (Anisuzzaman,1990:313).

On the other hand, in administering an Islamic state, in the strict sense, the values to be maximized are *Adle* and *Ihsan* , even if it means the sacrifice of 'efficiency' and 'economy' if the latter innately conflict with the former values. The other difference is that the Islamic model gives prioirity to Islamic values of ethics, morality , freedom, individual dignity and so forth, while the Western or secular models are production-oriented rather than human oriented. However, in its emphasis on values such as equity and justice, responsiveness to client needs and human dignity, the New Public Administration model somewhat resembles Islamic administrative model(see Table-2). Interesting point is that the movement for new public administration originated as a reaction to social crisis(such as continued racial strife as a reaction to inequities in the environment and urban riots etc.), whereas the values to be maximized in Islamic administration are universal. These are fixed values outlined by God and they do not change with the changes of time and place.

Table-2
An Islamic Administrative Model: Characteristics and Values

Theory	Empirical Focus (Unit of analysis)	Characteristics	Values to be maximised
Islamic Administrative Model (Al-Buraey based on the *Qur'an* and *Sunnah*)	=Individual/organizational behavior =*Shura* (decisions through mutual consultation) as the process =Leadership (participative).	=Non-secular in orientation (Value ladden) =Human orientation rather than production orientation =Stress on values, ethics and morality (from the Islamic point of view) =Cooperation rather than competition =Leadership authority but not absolute =*Shura* and consultation as a process =Anti-bureaucratic in nature.	=*Adle* (Justice), *Ihsan* (Welfare) =Freedom and social equity as outlined in *Sha'.riah* =Personal, material and spiritual growth =Human dignity =Equal access to services =Responsiveness to client needs and demands =Deligence in work and competence
6. New Public Administration Model (Marini, Waldo, Frederickson).	=Client needs and expectations.	=Debureaucratization =Client involvement in decision-making.	=Social equity

Source: Muhammed Al-Buraey,*Administrative Development:An Islamic Perspective*(London:KPI,1985),pp.334-337; and Frank Marini(ed.), *Toward a New Public Administration: A Minnowbrook Perspective*(Seranton: Chandler Publishing Company,1972).

The most important variables in Islamic administration, are the individual, the *Shura* and the *Shari'ah*. The individual is the public servant—the administrator—the bureaucrat, the most important human resource of the system who is responsible for converting the inputs into outputs. The Holy *Qur'an* says:

> "*Allah doth command you to render back your trust to those to whom they are due, and when judge between man and man, that ye judge with justice*(4:58); and
> "*Truly the best of men for thee to employ is the (man) who is 'strong' and 'trustworthy'*"(28:26).

According to Islamic scholars, 'strength' corresponds to the skill and qualifications the job requires and the ability to understand constitutional(Islamic) principles and the power to apply them; while 'trustworthy' applies to the fear of Allah, honesty, integrity and commitment to organizational goal(i.e.,social justice)(Sharfuddin,1987:233).Records

of history show that the Prophet(*SM*) and the rightly guided four *Khalifas* have always recruited the most qualified(well-versed in *Sha'ria* laws), intelligent yet God fearing, honest and truthful men in their administration of the Islamic state of Medina.

Public administrators in Islam have been cautioned by God to be impersonal in decision-making while dispensing justice. The Holy *Qur'an* says: *"O ye who believe! Be ye staunch in justice; witness for Allah, even though it be against yourself or (your) parents or(your) kindred,(then case be of) a rich man or a poor man, for Allah is nearer upto both(than you are). So follow no passion last you lapse or fail away, then lo! Allah is ever informed of what ye do"*(*Sura Nisaa*,4:135). In Islam, there can be no distinction between the ruler and the ruled, Moslems and non-Muslims etc. The *Qur'an* further states that: *"O ye who believe! let not hatred of any people(or community) dissuade you from dealing justly. Deal justly, for that is close to Godliness"*(*Sura Maida*,5:8).

The other important variable is *Shura*, which means decision through consultation. *Shura* is not a democratic process in the sense of majority vote. It seeks consensus building in decision-making based on Islamic ideals. In Islam, it is obligatory on the part of the individuals to be obedient to their leaders and follow their rightful decisions. On the other hand, leaders have been asked to conduct their affairs by mutual consultations with the followers(*Sura Shura*: 38; and *Sura Al-Imran*: 159).There are lots of evidences that to have the best and avoid mistakes, Prophet(*SM*) and the rightly guided *Khalifs* have always consulted with their companions in all important policy matters in the administration of Madina state. Even the non-Muslims were consulted in matters that pertain to politics, economics and military affairs(Watt,1974: 320).

Finally, in Islamic administration, S*hari'ah* affects every aspect of administration such as recruitment ,budgeting, supervision, efficiency, evaluation,and policy analysis etc.. In the Holy *Qur'an,* Allah(STA) says: *"O ye who believe! Obey God, and obey the Apostle, And those charged with authority among you, if ye differ in anything Among yourself, refer it To God and His Apostle If ye do believe in God And the Last Day. That is best, and most suitable for final determination"*(4:59).

However, to assure the feasibility and workability of this Islamic administrative model, certain conditions must exist: a) a total Islamic environment in the political, socio-economic and cultural sphere; b) existence and availability of individuals i.e., decision-makers and administrators who are committed to the values of Islam which includes good management and social justice; and c) the process of *shura* must be used(Al-Buraey,1985:353).

In an Islamic society, the following research questions may be asked:

1) Whether the civil servants are recruited on the basis of merit as defined in the *Qur'an* ?
2) What are the basic principles of Islamic personnel administration ?
3) What are the budgetary and financial methods advanced by Islam in the areas of financial admnistration ?
4) Whether *Shura* is being followed in administrative activities in Muslim countries ? Whether the *Shura* or consultation process makes inordinate delay in decision-making?

5) What are the motivation and promotion strategies in the public service in Islamic administration ?

6) How does Islam deal with the development of human resources?

But where is the environment for such research ? Islamic ideals of administration are hardly existed in the contemporary Muslim world.

IV. Present State of Affairs in the Muslim World

Islamic public administration model is an abstract construct. It does not describe the real world situation. Rather, it provides an ideal to which all Muslim societies should strive to approximate. This ideal is not,however, an utopian since incidents in Islamic history demonstrate its application and feasibility. In the present day Muslim world, one does not find an Islamic model as a form of governmental operations. Almost all of the 57 member countries of the OIC(Organization of Islamic Conference) have structured their politico-administrative system based on exogenous models(either autocratic or capitalist-democratic or socialist-autocratic which are not fully compatible with Islam).Our university education system is secular and patterned on Western universities.A content analysis of various courses at the universities and other training academies, reveals that almost all of them ignore Islam.Some of these even pose a challenge to the role of religion. "The resulting foreign orientation of the intelligentsia from which the political and administrative elites are typically drawn in 'transitional societies'", as Fred W. Riggs contends," increases receptivity to alien models for public policy decisions"(Riggs,1964:338). Alien models are also deliberately thrust upon local policy makers by foreign international technical assistance programmmes. This blind imitation of exogenous/extant systems has neither given the desired results due to environmental and cultural differences, nor could we develop any endogenous model appropriate to our environment. Moreover, in the absence of Islamic values and ethics, modern organizations in the Muslim countries which were evolved in response to science and technology and preoccupied with efficiency and economy, reflect a myriad of problems ranging from inefficiency and corruption to formalism and overlapping, which further inhibit their performance. This demonstration has reaffirmed that no model can be sound and effective unless it is grounded in the culture and ideology of the people which it is constructed to serve.

In such a situation, the ideal Islamic administrative model is being considered as the only way out of this impasse. All-out efforts are, therefore, needed to move away from whatever non-Islamic in our politico-administrative system, towards Islam. Because the welfare of the Muslims depends on Islam, and without Islam they have no future.

V. Conclusion: Challenge before the Islamic Scholars

The failure of the align theories and models of organization calls upon the Islamic scholars to re-examine their own culture and heritage for a possible alternative model or models that will replace the extant models of administration which do not suit Muslim culture or ideology. They are to create a vision for Muslims and give direction to it. Therefore, an Islamic model needs to be developed to serve the Muslims so that they can proceed in the right direction. How can this be done ? A group of scholars argue that the establishment of the Islamic state is a prerequisite for any Islamic development, whether it be economic, social, political, administrative or cultural and educational.The argument

is that the basic goal of the Islamic state is to maximise Islamic values, just as a socialist state seeks to maximise socialist values and a democratic state,democratic values. However, in the absence of such a state, to achieve the goal of Islamic administration, the Islamists may utilize any of the following four strategies proposed by Muhammad Al-Buraey: penetration, opposition, co-operation and integration(Al-Buraey,1985:378-382). Of the proposed strategies, penetration seems appropriate for the present moment.

The strategy of penetration implies that the Islamists will have to penetrate the existing politico-administrative system and work from within in an effort to reform the existing administrative institutions or alternately, to create separate Islamic organizations(such as interest-free Islamic Banking system). This is a step-by-step movement from a non-Islamic administration to an Islamic in order to avoid major disruptions.Similarly, penetrating the bureaucracy for the purpose of reforming it according to the Islamist's model, would be an effective implementation method with minimum resistance from the secular and anti-Islamic forces.

Another form of penetration may include penetrating the educational system, especially the institutions of higher learning. In education and training, Islamic principles of government, politics. economics and administration may be taught to students alongside various other theories and concepts of management and administration. Besides, the universities and civil service training academies might be persuaded to offer courses acquainting the learners with the theories and practices of Islamic Economics, Politics and Administration etc[*] Moreover the Islamists can also approach various higher commissions of administrative reforms and try to influence their outcomes. Penetration is also needed in the mass media and traditional religious institutions such as *Madrassas* and *Mosques.* In this way, time would come when the whole society would be prepared to implement the Islamic administrative model(which tries to maximise justice and welfare) in the real world situation.

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* The pains and pleasure of the author in presenting Islamic perspective to public administration teaching have been presented in an article titled,"Teaching of Public Administration from Islamic Perspective: The Experience of a University in Bangladesh". The participants are invited to browse through this paper from the following website**: www.islamiadmin.com or see the forthcoming book of the author entitled,** *Social Justice and Human Development***,2006.**

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