RESEARCH ARTICLE

THE ABBASID RULE IN BAGHDAD AND THE ISLAMIC GOVERNANCE CONCEPT ACCORDING TO AL-MAWARDI: A LITERATURE REVIEW

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Abstract

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Islamic governance, grounded in the principles of the al-Qur'an and al-Sunnah, has been consistently proven to be relevant and effective in shaping the development and sustainability of Islamic civilisation throughout the ages, including during the Abbasid era. Al-Mawardi's political philosophy, as articulated in his seminal literary work entitled al-Ahkam al-Sultaniyyah wa al-Wilayat al-Diniyyah, laid out a systematic and structured Islamic governance framework in the context of state administration. Under contemporary circumstances, where Islamic governance faces emerging challenges and evolving demands, policies and procedures rooted in Islamic principles must be prioritised by leaders who are trustees appointed by Allah SWT and bear the responsibility of managing the Muslim community's affairs with integrity, sincerity and accountability. This study aimed to explore the historical development of the Abbasid Caliphate's governance system and examine al-Mawardi's vision of governance as presented in his writings. This qualitative study analysed existing literature to understand how al-Mawardi interpreted and addressed the political authority of the Abbasid Caliphate. Findings indicate that the governance principles advocated by al-Mawardi played a crucial role in strengthening the caliph's authority, even in the face of external pressure and interference. This study concluded that al-Mawardi's governance model should be revisited and thoughtfully adapted in the modern context to enhance the effectiveness and resilience of contemporary Islamic administrative systems.

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Introduction:-

Governance is a critical component in the development of leadership or administration. Hence, Islam has laid down a governance framework that remains relevant across all eras, rooted in the al-Qur'an and Hadith. These foundational texts serve as primary references for establishing a just and effective rule. The principles of Islamic governance, derived from the al-Qur'an and Hadith, promote key values that are essential to any governance model, including tawhid (oneness of God), justice, trustworthiness, reliability and accountability (Khan & Hussain, 2021). At the heart of this model is the tawhid concept, which acts as the central guiding principle. Tawhid influences an organisation's internal and external environment, when firmly upheld, by instilling fairness and integrity. Consequently, this framework positions Islamic governance as a universal model, one that transcends time and remains relevant in guiding leadership and administration through all ages (Yusof, 2004).

Naqvi et al. (2011) outlined an Islamic governance model that underscores the importance of the relationship between a leader and the organization he leads. The study opined that a leader must play a prominent role in the organization to ensure that the leadership structure consistently upholds values rooted in Islamic teachings. Whereas, Sheikh Hussin and Zulkarnain (2011) emphasized that Islamic governance involves administrators, managers and employees who collectively place their faith in Allah SWT and His Messenger Prophet Muhammad PBUH, as the foundation of their beliefs. This is because one must first commit to Islamic principles before acting professionally. Moreover, Islam encourages Muslim professionals to view worldly success and benefits as tools for attaining eternal success and spiritual gain in the afterlife.

Governance is a key element in the development of a civilization. This is evident in the study of previous Islamic civilizations, such as the Abbasid Caliphate, which stood as a testament to Islam's golden age, which thrived from 750 to 1258 (132 to 656H) in Baghdad (in present-day Iraq). The Abbasid Caliphate went through several phases, beginning with its establishment, peak prosperity and eventual decline. In brief, the Abbasid Caliphate was led by a caliph, supported by viziers, governors, and ministers. Among the governance reforms introduced during this era were the consolidation of religious and political authority under the caliph, refinement of the vizier's role and creation of new administrative positions, such as the kitabah (secretarial) and hijabah (chamberlain), which served as aides to the vizier and guards to the caliph (Nurfazillah, 2020).

According to al-Mawardi (1983), governance-related legal rulings should be prioritized by rulers, given their entrusted role in leading society; however, rulers often found themselves burdened by political and administrative matters. Hence, al-Mawardi developed a governance framework at the request of the caliph, aimed at helping the caliphate understand various legal perspectives pertaining to governance from different schools of Islamic jurisprudence. This initiative sought to enable rulers to carry out their responsibilities fairly and to implement laws with fairness and justice in all their decisions.

This study focused on Islamic governance frameworks formulated during the turbulent period of the Abbasid Caliphate. According to Bayu Karunia et al. (2023), the Abbasid government's weakness at the time sparked a need for intellectual contributions to support and improve the caliph's system. These challenges stemmed from foreign interference, particularly from the Turks and Persians, which gradually diminished the caliph's authority. In response to these challenges, Caliph al-Qadir called upon scholars to contribute their knowledge, especially pertaining to administration. This call was answered by key figures such as al-Mawardi, who constructed a comprehensive Islamic governance framework in an effort to safeguard the caliph's position, particularly among the Quraysh tribe. This initiative was not only aimed at restoring the caliph's authority but also to ensure that Islamic governance principles continued to be relevant and capable of addressing the political and social challenges of that era.

A study on al-Mawardi's literary works, especially al-Ahkam al-Sultaniyyah wa al-Wilayat al-Diniyyah, is crucial, as this text stands as a primary source for understanding the Islamic governance concept. According to Siti Amina (2021), al-Ahkam al-Sultaniyyah wa al-Wilayat al-Diniyyah serves as a comprehensive reference on the Islamic state concept. The book addresses political and administrative aspects of governance, making it a central guide in Islamic political thought and an important reference for those in leadership. Moreover, al-Mawardi's political philosophy presents a holistic and balanced governance framework. Therefore, his ideas remain relevant until today, especially in discourses and efforts to establish governance systems grounded in Islamic values.

Overall, this study explored the evolution of governance in the Abbasid Caliphate, while reviewing the significant contributions of al-Mawardi through his seminal work, al-Ahkam al-Sultaniyyah wa al-Wilayat al-Diniyyah. The focus is on his efforts to construct an Islamic governance framework rooted in Shariah principles, yet pragmatic enough to address the political realities of his time. This study aimed to demonstrate how al-Mawardi's thoughts were relevant during his own era and how it continues to influence contemporary discourse on Islamic governance and political theories that remain significant until today.

Methodology:-

This qualitative study focused on previous research through three main methods, namely library research, historical analysis and document analysis. These approaches were chosen to allow the study to extensively explore the historical context, meaning, and interpretation of thoughts on Islamic governance presented in al-Mawardi's literary works, particularly in the context of the Abbasid Caliphate in Baghdad.

Library research served as the main approach for gathering relevant primary and secondary data sources. Primary sources included references to al-Ahkam al-Sultaniyyah wa al-Wilayat al-Diniyyah and Qawanin al-Wizarah wa Siyasat al-Mulk, while secondary sources consisted of scholarly books, journal articles and theses that discussed the Islamic governance concept and aspects of al-Mawardi's political thoughts. This approach enabled the study to examine a range of academic perspectives in order to build a comprehensive understanding of al-Mawardi's proposed governance framework. The historical approach was employed to examine the era that shaped al-Mawardi's thoughts, particularly during the Abbasid rule. This method mainly focused on the political climate, administrative structure and challenges faced by the caliph at that time, which are essential for understanding the purpose and significance of al-Mawardi's literary works. Document analysis was also applied to evaluate the core content of the identified primary sources. This analysis focused on the principles, values and governance frameworks highlighted by al-Mawardi, along with their implication on Islamic administration and leadership. These methodological approaches collectively form the foundation for a comprehensive literature review presented in this article

Analysis and Discussion:-

Establishment of the Abbasid Caliphate marked a significant historical event in Islamic civilization. The transition of power from the Umayyad to the Abbasid dynasty brought changes to the political structure and had a profound impact on the administrative system and territorial governance of the Islamic empire. Following the takeover of Kufah and Basrah by forces supporting Banu al-'Abbas, Abu al-'Abbas al-Saffah had pledged allegiance as the caliph in Kufah on the night of Friday, 13 Rabiulakhir 131H. Some accounts stated that the first person to pledge allegiance to him was Abu Salamah al-Khallal; however, other sources argued that this event took place on 1 Rabiulakhir 132H, since by this time, Abu al-'Abbas al-Saffah had successfully gained full control over Iraq, Khurasan, Hijaz, Syria and Egypt (Ibn Kathir, 2005).

Caliph Abu al-'Abbas al-Saffah, whose full name was 'Abd Allah al-Saffah ibn Muhammad ibn al-Imam ibn 'Ali Zayn al-'Abidin ibn 'Abd Allah al-Hibr ibn 'Abbas ibn 'Abd al-Muttalib, hailed from the Quraysh lineage. He was born and raised in Syria before moving to Kufah after his brother, Ibrahim al-Imam, was captured by Caliph Marwan. Abu al-'Abbas al-Saffah pledged allegiance as the caliph in Kufah at the age of 26 and ruled for four years and nine months. He passed away at the age of 31 in al-Anbar due to smallpox (Ibn Kathir, 2005).

The Abbasid dynasty experienced a golden age as well as periods of internal strife throughout the rule of successive Abbasid caliphs, which deeply influenced its administrative system. According to Udjang (2002), administrative turmoil began during the reign of Caliph al-Mutawakkil, who was assassinated for implementing anti-Turkish policies. This was because the Turkish military held overwhelming influence and was capable of undermining the caliph's authority. The instability continued under subsequent caliphs, including Caliph al-Qadir Billah (Udjang, 2002).

Despite facing a period of decline, efforts were made by certain caliphs and scholars to preserve the political and administrative authority of the Abbasid state. Caliph al-Qadir Billah was among those who sought to reform the Abbasid administration by encouraging scholars to contribute their insight and counsel through written literary works. He came to power during a period of upheaval after the dismissal of Caliph al-Ta'i'. Although al-Ta'i' was placed under house arrest, he reportedly criticized Caliph al-Qadir Billah's modest lifestyle, especially regarding his

simple choices of clothing and food. Nevertheless, Caliph al-Qadir Billah exhibited commendable character by ensuring al-Ta'i''s well-being during his confinement. He appointed caretakers to attend to al-Ta'i''s needs until his death (Ibn Kathir, 2005).The brilliance of Caliph al-Qadir Billah marked a pivotal turning point in the relationship between the caliphate institution and the influence of the Buyid dynasty. In his efforts to restore full authority to the caliphate's administrative system, he took strategic steps to forge strong alliances with scholars from various disciplines, including experts in Islamic jurisprudence, such as al-Bayhaqi, al-Mawardi and Abu Ya'la. These efforts were part of al-Qadir Billah's broader initiative to strengthen the Abbasid administrative structure, which at that time was experiencing significant instability (Udjang, 2002).

Among the scholars who played a vital role in this collaboration was al-Mawardi, whose contributions had a lasting impact on the formulation of Islamic governance. Caliph al-Qadir Billah was particularly impressed by al-Mawardi's literary work al-Iqna', which led to his appointment as the Chief Judge (Aqda al-Qudat). During his tenure, al-Mawardi remained actively engaged in intellectual pursuits, especially in the areas of politics and administration. Some of his major literary works include al-Ahkam al-Sultaniyyah wa al-Wilayat al-Diniyyah, Nasihat al-Muluk, Tashil al-Nazar wa Ta'jil al-Zafar, and Qawanin al-Wizarah wa Siyasat al-Mulk (Mian, 1963).

Among al-Mawardi's notable literary writings on governance are Tashil al-Nazar wa Ta'jil al-Zafar, Qawanin al-Wizarah wa Siyasat al-Mulk, Adab al-Dunya wa al-Din, and al-Ahkam al-Sultaniyyah. According to al-Baghdadi (1981), all of these literary works, except for al-Ahkam al-Sultaniyyah, are believed to have been written toward the end of Caliph al-Qadir Billah's reign, between 422 and1030 (381 to 991H). Meanwhile, al-Ahkam al-Sultaniyyah wa al-Wilayat al-Diniyyah is thought to have been written during the reign of Caliph al-Qa'im, around 1074 (467H). These literary works reflect al-Mawardi's intellectual commitment to reinforcing Islamic governance through a systematic and structured approach.

The successful collaboration between the caliph and scholars is evident in the writing of Qawanin al-Wizarah wa Siyasat al-Mulk, which reflects the robustness of the intellectual and administrative structure of the era. Although al-Mawardi wrote during a time when foreign powers were interfering in the affairs of the caliphate, this period remains one of the most intellectually productive in Islamic civilization, particularly in terms of knowledge production and intellectual development. Moreover, Baghdad at the time was recognized as a centre for excellence in intellectual pursuits, art, philosophy, politics and economics (al-Mawardi, 2002).

Al-Mawardi's contributions were instrumental in maintaining the Abbasid dynasty's political stability. According to Rashda Diana (2017), the governance framework established during this period laid the groundwork for diplomatic relations between the Abbasid caliphate and the Buyid dynasty, which dominated the administration of the Abbasid caliphate at the time. Therefore, she argued that this historical episode serves as an important example for harmonizing political relations between the Islamic world and the West.

Abu al-Hasan 'Ali ibn Muhammad ibn Habib al-Basri al-Baghdadi, better known as al-Mawardi (364H/975-450H/1058), was a prominent Islamic scholar renowned for his expertise in fiqh, usul, tafsir, linguistics, literature, sociology, ethics and politics. He served as a judge (qadi) in various regions and was awarded the title Aqda al-Qudat (Chief Judge) in 1058 due to his vast scholarly legal knowledge. Despite the political turbulence of the era, during which the Abbasid caliphate was under the dominance of the Buyids, al-Mawardi succeeded in producing major literary works such as al-Ahkam al-Sultaniyyah wa al-Wilayat al-Diniyyah dan Qawanin al-Wizarah wa Siyasat al-Mulk, in an effort to defend the authority of the caliph and strengthen the institutions of Islamic governance. Although he was at times accused of being influenced by Mu'tazilite thoughts due to his rational and open-minded approach, his contributions are still recognized as a significant legacy in the Islamic intellectual tradition (al-Mawardi, 2002).

According to al-Baghdadi (1981), al-Mawardi was one of the earliest Muslim scholars to compile various aspects of Islamic administration and law, and eventually present them in a systematic scholarly form. His work culminated in an important treatise (al-Ahkam al-Sultaniyyah wa al-Wilayat al-Diniyyah), which remains a foundational reference in Islamic political theory and governance. Furthermore, as noted by Wan Naim (2015), this work has retained its relevance to the present day and has been published and translated into several foreign languages, including Malay and English. The enduring coherence and consistency of its content has established al-Mawardi as a key figure in shaping the intellectual framework for Islamic political thinking and governance.

According to al-Baghdadi (1981), several European scholars have acknowledged al-Ahkam al-Sultaniyyah wa al-Wilayat al-Diniyyah as a significant document in the development of Islamic political thought. This literary work is not merely a compilation of established political theories; rather, it presents a structured framework shaped by the political realities and pressures of al-Mawardi's time. Besides that, the book functions as a justification and analytical response to contemporary political circumstances, culminating in a well-formed and enduring political theory.

Various academic studies have explored al-Mawardi's political thought based on his literary contributions. Bayu Karunia et al. (2023) focused exclusively on al-al-Ahkam al-Sultaniyyah wa al-Wilayat al-Diniyyah and asserted that al-Mawardi's political framework was greatly influenced by the turmoil facing the Abbasid Caliphate, compelling him to write with the aim of defending the caliphate system dominated by Quraysh lineage. In addition, Bayu Karunia et al. (2023) highlighted two key components in al-Mawardi's political thoughts, which is namely the advancement of civilization that hinges on six essential elements, such as religion, leadership, justice, security, fertile lands and a desire to live, as well as clear guidelines for the selection of leadership to ensure political stability.

A similar study by Supian (2020) delved into al-Mawardi's political philosophy using the same foundational literary work (al-Ahkam al-Sultaniyyah wa al-Wilayat al-Diniyyah). However, Supian approached the subject from a comparative aspect, namely by analysing and comparing the political perspectives of al-Mawardi and Ibn Taimiyyah. The findings suggested that the political theories of both scholars were shaped by the prevailing socio-political conditions of their respective eras. Al-Mawardi's ideas reflect his literary work's influence on the Abbasid caliphate, as evidenced by the attention his writings received from the caliphate. In contrast, Ibn Taimiyyah's writings were more focused on advocating justice and holding rulers accountable for their actions.

Masyrofah and Gilang Rizki (2022) also focused on al-Mawardi's views regarding the vizierate concept (ministerial governance). Drawing from the scripture entitled Qawanin al-Wizarah wa Siyasat al-Mulk (al-Mawardi, 2002), the authors explored al-Mawardi's classification of the vizier's role:

- Wazir Tafwid: This term refers to a vizier (minister) who is granted full executive authority by the caliph to independently manage state affairs, without needing to consult the caliph regarding every decision. In this governance model, the caliph serves a more symbolic role and refrains from direct involvement in administrative matters. The Wazir Tafwid holds a level of authority that closely mirrors the caliph in terms of governance and administrative aspects.
- Wazir Tanfidh: This type of minister operates as an executor of the caliph's directives. His powers are limited strictly to the implementation of policies and decisions made by higher authority, and all actions remain under the direct supervision of the caliph. Ministers in this category do not possess the autonomy to make strategic decisions without prior approval from the caliph.

Rashda Diana et al. (2021) focused on al-Mawardi's political philosophy, particularly his concept of imamah (leadership). According to the study, al-Mawardi outlined leadership's five key aspects, as follows:

- Obligation to establish an imamah,
- Process of appointing a caliph,
- Procedures for selecting a leader,
- Duties and rights of a leader, and
- Deposing of a leader when there are signs of deficiencies or incompetence evident in leader.

Al-Mawardi placed great importance on the role of the imam (religious leader or head of state) in the Islamic governance system. Position of the imam, or head of state, was established to succeed the role of Prophet Muhammad PBUH, namely to safeguard religion and manage worldly affairs. The decree for appointing an imam or head of state to fulfil these responsibilities is based on obligatory by consensus (ijma'), despite some fringe views that reject this basis. Differing views exist as to whether this obligatory basis is grounded in rational thinking ('aql) or divine command (shar'iah). One viewpoint argues that it is rationally based, as it is natural for intelligent people to submit to a leader capable of preventing oppression and resolving disputes. The absence of leadership would result in social chaos, vulnerability and neglect (al-Mawardi, 1983).

It can be concluded that previous studies have clearly indicated that al-Mawardi's political thoughts continue to attract scholarly interest, especially in the areas of governance and leadership. These studies emphasize the multifaceted dimensions of his ideas, including the political framework presented in al-Ahkam al-Sultaniyyah wa al-Wilayat al-Diniyyah, through the vizierate concept and his leadership principles in the imamah context. A thorough examination of al-Mawardi's thoughts highlight its relevance and potential application in modern contexts, especially in the development of governance systems grounded in Islamic values. Hence, his theories and views remain pertinent and serve as critical references for reinforcing a more effective and principled Islamic administration today.

An Analysis of the Discussion:-

Al-Mawardi was one of the prominent scholars who played a vital role in consolidating the Abbasid Caliphate's administrative structure, especially through his close relationship with the caliphate authority. He outlined a comprehensive and well-organized framework for governance in his seminal work, al-Ahkam al-Sultaniyyah wa al-Wilayat al-Diniyyah, as illustrated in Figures 1 and 2.
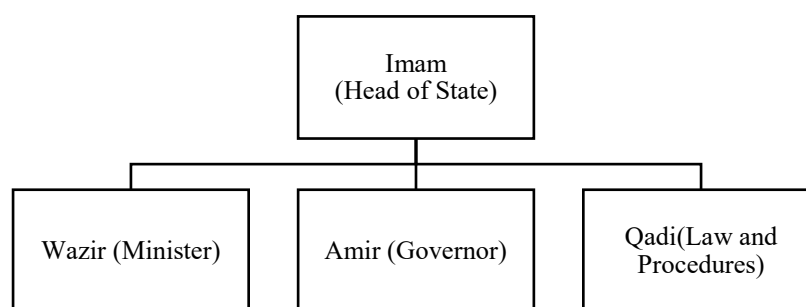

Figure 1:- Appointment of Main Posts.
Source: al-Mawardi, 1983.

Figure 1 illustrates the appointment structure of key positions in the governance of the state, as outlined by al-Mawardi. He emphasized the importance of appointing four main institutions, namely the Imam as the head of state, Wazir (minister), Amir (governor), and Qadi (judge), with each entrusted with specific responsibilities for implementing law and judicial procedures. These four institutions reflect the principle of power balance in state administrations based on the Islamic governance framework. Chapters related to these institutions are described as follows (al-Mawardi, 1983):

- Chapter One: Appointment of the Imam (Head of State)
- Chapter Two: Appointment of the Wazir (Minister)
- Chapter Three: Appointment of State Administrators
- Chapter Four: Appointment of Jihad Administrators

Figure 2:- Areas of Responsibility of Government Officers.
Source: al-Mawardi, 1983.

Meanwhile, Figure 2 details the main areas of responsibility that government officials must oversee, which include national defence, judicial system, religious rituals, economy, taxation, land and water affairs, ministries and departments, enforcement of hudud laws and internal security. All these aspects demonstrate that the Islamic governance framework laid out by al-Mawardi goes beyond political administration, as it includes social, economic and religious matters, thus serving as a comprehensive guide for Islamic governance. The responsibilities are outlined in the following chapters (al-Mawardi, 1983):

- Chapter Five: Authority over public interests
- Chapter Six: Authority of the Qadi (judge)
- Chapter Seven: Authority of the overseer of oppression
- Chapter Eight: Authority of the overseer of lineage
- Chapter Nine: Authority of the prayer imam
- Chapter Ten: Authority over Hajj rituals
- Chapter Eleven: Authority of the zakat administrator
- Chapter Twelve: Distribution of confiscated property
- Chapter Thirteen: Conditions of head tax and land tax
- Chapter Fourteen: Differences in laws among provinces
- Chapter Fifteen: Cultivation of abandoned land and securing water sources
- Chapter Sixteen: Prohibited zones and reserved areas
- Chapter Seventeen: Laws concerning land distribution
- Chapter Eighteen: Establishment of departments and their regulations
- Chapter Nineteen: Criminal laws
- Chapter Twenty: Laws of hisbah (market regulation and public morality)

Therefore, the detailed explanation provided by al-Mawardi regarding the structure portraying the appointments and roles of government officials reveal a well-organized and systematic Islamic governance model. This administrative framework emphasizes political and judicial aspects as well as social, economic and religious affairs. This framework indirectly reflects al-Mawardi's interpretation of the realities and needs of the Abbasid Caliphate, which was grappling with challenges posed by political administration and the caliphate system during that period.

Conclusion:-
This study highlights that Islamic governance, founded on the al-Quran and Hadith, forms a critical basis for building a flourishing Islamic civilization. Core principles, such as tawhid (monotheism), justice, trustworthiness, shura (consultation), and accountability, are essential elements that shape an effective governance framework. and offer practical solutions to the social, political and economic challenges faced by the Abbasid government, especially during turbulent times.

Al-Mawardi's ideas had significantly contributed towards strengthening administrative structures through reforms, such as the role of wazir tafwid (delegated minister) and wazir tanfidh (executive minister), alongside clear guidelines for appointing leaders. His political thoughts remain affirmatively relevant until today, mainly in modern administrative contexts. The governance principles he outlined can serve as a guide for establishing integral, just and Shariah-based systems. This study further emphasizes the necessity for the continued application of Islamic governance principles to ensure sustainable development grounded on Islamic values.

Therefore, al-Mawardi's thoughts extend beyond contributing extensively to the Abbasid caliphate, by providing a vital heritage to Islamic history. Islamic governance has the potential to address contemporary challenges and create a holistically nurturing society by understanding as well as adopting and integrating his principles into a modern framework. Therefore, further research on al-Mawardi's literary work related to administration and governance should be conducted to deepen the appreciation of his contributions in the context of contemporary governance.

Acknowledgement:-

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