



Arab Spring Genesis through Manipulation of Islamic Rhetoric

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Abstract

Islam is the primary motivating factor in the Muslim world in general and specifically in the Arab world. Whenever there is an uprising in the Muslim world it is primarily motivated by Islam or the individual get their aspiration from Islamic rhetorical slogans depicting Islamic identity and affiliation. The Arab upheaval commonly known as Arab Spring was a product primarily of the domestic and foreign factors still Islam and Islamic rhetoric was extensively used to accelerate the momentum in favor of the uprising and driving the motives of the demonstrators and many new regimes that got power in the post uprising governments were Islamists. during the course of time in the Arab Spring Islam and Islamic rhetoric was extensively used by the opposing parties, Friday sermons were a major tool in the hand of the demonstrators, the leaders of the demonstrators used to organize agitations after Friday prayers and mosques were used as offices, Islamists were divided into three groups on the basis of their aspiration to use Islam as a tool in achieving their objectives these were a) Secular Islamists, b) Reformists Islamists c) Revolutionary Islamists. All these Islamists used Islamic rhetoric to motivate the demonstrators and chanted Islamic slogans, the findings of this research is based on content analysis of secondary data related to the use of Islamic rhetoric and it was observed that Islamic rhetoric was very effectively used in mobilizing the masses, although the results of the uprising remained geography dependent, and the outcome was also dependent on the country and place, still the impact of Islamic rhetoric is lasting and can be seen even in the post Arab Spring scenario. This paper analyzes the use of Islamic Rhetoric in the process of upheaval in the Arab world mostly understood as Arab Spring.

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INTRODUCTION

Academic specialists were predicting a great social uprising in the Middle East because of the persistence of authoritarian rule in the region. People were generally deprived of their basic freedom like freedom of free speech and liberty. The prevailing system in many countries was not according to the wishes of the people. People were suffering from mass unemployment and inflation amalgamated with the unequal distribution of wealth. The global powers were in favor of the regimes because of their economic and hegemonic agenda. The war in Iraq and the Palestinian issue were also major irritating causes that produced grievances in the hearts of the people of the Middle East. People are more inclined towards the Islamic organizations like Muslim Brotherhood and *Ennahda*.

According to Hoffman and Jamal (2014) Arab youth love their religion and their uprising in the last decade was for freedom, liberty and economic prosperity under the shadow of Islam. The Western media portrays their struggle as a democratic struggle which is not correct. Arabs love Islam and their main aspiration was the implementation of Islamic *Sharia*.

According to (Eghdamian, 2014) the use of Islamic slogans shows that the youth of the Arab world has a strong affiliation with their religion and they want their countries to be ruled by Islamic principles. He observed that mosques were the focal point for arranging demonstrations, while Friday sermons were used to motivate the demonstrators in the Arab streets. Nevertheless, the connectivity of these young generations through social media platforms play a significant role in creating awareness (Malik et al., 2016).

Researchers support the idea that contacts between religious groups played a vital role in the uprising and organizing the events (Benhabib, 2011). One author argues that Western powers are in favor of those regimes that are secular in nature and cannot tolerate any Islamic rule in the Muslim world (Taşkin, 2013). West only used the Islamic rhetoric of the people for their own gains and would withdraw their support when Islamists come into power.

One author narrates that Islamic rhetoric was kept non-functional and ineffective since the creation of

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Arab states after the demise of the Ottoman Empire (Abdelrahman, 2014). The secular regimes installed by the western powers were used to extract the wealth of the Middle East countries and use its strategic location for their hegemonic aspirations. When a need for change was felt in these geographies the Islamic affiliation of the people was used to motivate demonstrations and agitations in the Arab world.

“Permeating the entire Islamic heritage has been a characteristic fusion of language, politics, and religion. Central to the Muslim Weltanschauung is the notion of a theocracy or religious state, in which secular power derives its impetus from adherence to the doctrines of Islamic law (the Sharia)”(Merriam, 1974).

“Throughout the Muslim world, the village spiritual leader (mullah) often functions as the chief legal administrator and political spokesman as well. Since Mohammed, military commanders have served as leaders of prayer, and Northwick has shown that sermons and related religious institutions continue to provide a highly credible medium for politically oriented messages”(Jones, 2006; Merriam, 1974).

“Islamic militants’ main objective is not conquest, but to beat back what they perceive as an aggressive West that is supposedly trying to complete the project begun during the Crusades and colonial periods of denigrating, dividing, and humiliating Islam. The militants’ secondary goal is the establishment of the caliphate, or single Islamic state”(Burke III, 2009).

Lister (2015) pointed out that Muslims in the Arab world have a lasting aspiration to create an Islamic state based on the golden principles of Islam, where there is no boundary and only one Caliph portrays the unity of Muslim *Umma* (nation). Many long standing regimes in Middle East like the Egyptian regime of Hosni Mubarak and the Zain al Abedin regime in Tunisia were replaced by Islamic organizations, similarly some regimes are on war with the Islamists like the Syrian and Iraqi regimes with the help of their foreign friends. Some countries like Yemen and Libya fell into complete chaos and are struggling for survival. Islam is the only uniting force in the region if foreign interventions in these countries have not supported one faction or the other they would have developed their consensus on the Islamic *sharia*.

Research Problem:

There has been a close link between the uprising and Islam in the Middle East. History reveal that whenever there was a need for uprising in the Middle East, Islam and Islamic rhetoric has played a major role in motivating the people as there is an immense love for religion among the people of the region.

When Arab Spring started, although there were many domestic, historical and administrative reasons for the uprising, still Islam and Islamic rhetoric was used to mobilize the masses. This study examines how Islam and Islamic rhetoric was used to bring the masses to the streets.

Aims and objectives:

The key objectives of the research are:

1. To explore the motive behind the regime change
2. To explore the use and impact of Islamic rhetoric in the uprising
3. To find out how Islamic rhetoric was used in activating the masses

Research Questions

1. How was Islamic rhetoric used to motivate the protesters?
2. What was the impact of using Islamic rhetoric on the Arab Spring?

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Lynch (2011) many political scientists were puzzled by the sudden and abrupt spread of the demonstrations in the Arab world, the domino effect of the uprising was very much surprising. Beaumont (2011) explains that the self-immolation of *Mohammad Bouazizi* ignited agitation in the greater Middle East when he set himself on fire because of the violent behavior of a lady police officer on 17th of December 2010. This research shows that the event was manipulated by the demonstrators to achieve their goal of overthrowing the regime and they used their Islamic identity to provoke demonstrations.

Academicians are divided into three schools of thoughts on the basis of their classification and interpretation of revolution. Le Bon (1913) and Sorokin (1925) the crowd psychology is considered as the primary factor for starting the revolution. Davis (1959) describes that relative deprivation is the starting cause for a revolution to evolve he explains that relative deprivation starts when an individual which he calls as *EGO*, looks at another person and consider himself deprived in comparison to the second person whom he calls *ALTER*, this condition is called as relative deprivation which may lead to aggression and agitation in a community and when religious thoughts are combined with such an *EGO* it could lead to catastrophic consequences. This study is focused on exploring the fact that how this relative deprivation of the masses was exploited by the regime opponent to gain their objectives and they

used Islamic slogans to get their job done.

Olson (2009) argues that when an individual religious thinking is provoked through rational and deliberate choices that will drive a person's motivation towards agitation and uprising. The author argues that the motive to achieve religious honor and eternal satisfaction motivate a person for revolt and at odds with status quo and this rebellion encompasses the concept of collective action problem. This phenomenon of using religious rhetoric was observed in the Arab Spring up to great extent.

Borthwick (1967) delineates that Middle East politics had remained under the Islamic religious shadow up to the extent that elites used to start the Friday sermons by the name of ruling sovereign so as to develop Islamic political mind set of the people and this has become the active part of their political life as encoded in their political genetic makeup. Flynn (2011) describe the term relative deprivation (RD) and argues that this term was used in the 1960s and was used to explain the discontent of an individual or group related to a specific point of reference particularly in a political scenario.

Walker and Smith (2002) divided the term relative deprivation into two sub-classes: first, egoistic or personal relative deprivation is based on individual relative deprivation. Second, fraternalistic or group relative deprivation, also called collective deprivation, compels a group of people to strive for change in the status quo.

Morrison (1971) and Taylor (2002) both argue that the persistence of relative deprivation in a society could lead to a social and political need for change, because the collective thinking of deprivation from power, wealth, and so on may lead a group of people to a political movement to break the existing status quo. Dubé and Guimond (1986) explain that the change carried out by the motive of relative deprivation may be very swift and dramatic because individual and groups develop enmity towards the amusing elites. This research has found the swift change of regime in the Middle East and there is a strong correlation between the two phenomena of deprivation and revolution.

Taylor (2002) postulates that the deprived group which consider their deprivation as fraternal deprivation that make them aggressive against the elites and such type of aggressive groups have the potential to bring change. Ted (1970) delineate that value capabilities and value expectations difference leads to relative deprivation, when deliberate objectives are not achieved it could develop collective aggression

and brutality. He has divided relative deprivation into three categories like detrimental, inspirational, and social deprivation. These could lead to potential trigger for savagery and aggression. The frustration-aggression mechanism that arise from the deprivation of basic right could leads to violence (Dugré & Potvin, 2021; Igbini, 2020). This has led to unrest and destabilization in the Arab World.

Ascher and Mirovitskaya (2013) explains that religious, ethnic and socio-economic split leads to political instability and insisted for change. Arab Spring is a practical example of such religious phenomena. Ted (1970) states that “relative deprivation theory is the tension that develops from a discrepancy between the ‘ought’ and the ‘is’ of collective value satisfaction, and that disposes men to violence.”Caren et al. (2017) Postulated that collective deprivation leads to emotional movements as mobs are activated by emotional slogans and these emotions are used by certain circles contrary to the individuals’ interests. Arab Spring has demonstrated this phenomenon. Most of the demonstrators were suffering from deprivation and their religious zeal was used to motivate them to uprisings that eventually lead to the overthrow of regime in many countries of the Middle East.

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative method of research is used to understand the phenomenon from the perspective of Arab affairs’ experts. The method is most appropriate due to gleaned themes from the secondary data and get insights through applying qualitative research techniques (Malik et al., 2021; Malik et al., 2019). Most often qualitative research is carried out through books, research articles, and news and media reports (Bengtsson, 2016). This study is based on secondary data and comprises analytical, descriptive, historical, sequential, existent, and real scenarios of regional and global politics.

Conceptual content analysis method was used to categorize different concepts and their occurrences in different newspapers and research journals(Garcia-Gil & Cortiñas-Rovira, 2018). The chosen concept was Arab spring and the researchers observed publications on this idea or phenomenon.

Theoretical Framework

After the extensive literature reviews, the researchers found that frustration aggression theory is the stimulating factor that leads to the uprising of the people. This led to the uprising and revolution of these nations.

The Frustration Aggression Theory

Gurr (1968) is the pioneer of the Frustration Aggression theory. The core assumption of the study is that belligerence and hostility towards masses is proportional to frustration. Frustration-Aggression leads to deprivation which in turn leads violence. The severity of violence and anti-government demonstrations depends upon the degree of deprivation. The motive of the people is ignited through common rhetoric like Islam in the case of Arab Spring.

The frustration of the people was high because of lack of basic human needs like food prices were high and youth were jobless. The government machinery was used to exploit the masses as people were feeling abused and disrespected by the elites through security agencies and bureaucracy.

Research Nature

The research work underpins on descriptive, historical, and sequential which comprised secondary data from the real world scenarios of Middle East politics and the uprising of the Arab world in the subsequent years.

Secondary Data

The data is secondary in nature and gleaned from the eminent newspapers, journals, news channels, and other online sources

Data Analysis Techniques

The collected data was tabulated, organized, and finally analyzed by applying content analysis method. The Arab Springs and relevant concept were the themes chosen for the primary reason that they were repeated with a high frequency and drastically influence the masses which raise their voices against the regimes.

Limitations of the Study

This study writhes from certain precincts. Secondary data is used which is based on regional and foreign expert opinion which may include their weird and organizational chauvinism. The study is directed not

to the exact measurement rather it is directed to judge the impact. Resource and time are also major constraints.

Dignity

People were feeling dishonored by the states agencies and they wanted “*Karama*”, Arabic name for dignity. The processions used the slogans of “*Karama*” during their processions and demanded for dignity. The streets of Egypt, Libya and Tunisia were resonating with the slogans of *bread, Freedom and human dignity*. People were placed behind the bars without proper legal procedures, telephones were taped, and those who opposed the elite were humiliated.

Islam and the Arab Upheaval

Western media shay away from the fact that Islam is the primary motivating factor in organizing demonstration during the Arab Spring. Many other secularists’ movements were there but the primary motive was Islam and Islamic affiliation of the people of the Arab world like the Egyptian KAFAYA movement where Islamists and secularists were combined to overthrow the Mubarak regime never the less Islamic slogans like *Allahoakbar* was commonly used in demonstrations. The demonstrators were called “*Mujahedeen*” and those killed in the demonstrations were called martyrs (Failed, 2013).

The Islamic political movements were suppressed in the Middle East but the US invasion of Iraq and the Palestinian Intifada has greatly accelerated the Islamic political movements that resulted in greater participation of the Islamists in the Arab spring. The vacuum created after the fall of regimes in the Arab world was filled by the Islamists parties like Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and *Al-Noor* party and Tunisian *Ennahda* party (Al-Anani, 2012).

The rich source of Islamic Friday sermons were used mostly to spread and repeat the message of Islam in the Muslim world, these sermons were politicized during the time of the Arab upheaval. Quranic verses about social justice, humanity and freedom were chanted in the demonstrations. Mosques remained the locus of control in the times of demonstrations and worked as control rooms for the demonstrators. Friday used to be an active day in the demonstrations being a Muslim holiday. People used to come out in groups after their Friday payers and staged agitations. People use to stay in Mosques in big cities instead of going back home.

The uprising was nurtured by Islamic motive as Islam remained the motivating factor throughout the history and particularly during the post-World War I Middle East. Islam remained the prominent

opposition to the western installed regimes in the Middle East. The Western installed regimes used to portray Arab nationalist stance to stabilize their regimes which was most often opposed by the Islamists *Ikhwans* during the past century (El-Sherif, 2014).

The secularists regimes lie the *Ba,athist* in Iraq and Syria and the monarchies as well as the constitutional monarchies all felt threat from the Islamists and promoted Western democracy. This system based on Western philosophy started malfunctioning because of some immediate factors like inflation, increased inequality, perpetual poverty and lack of employment amalgamated with some background factors like repression, lack of liberty and corruption, nepotism and cronyism created an atmosphere where secularists mixed with Islamists to overthrow the regimes. The deep rooted Islamists organizations were very active because of their street power and their willingness to get maximum power share in the post regime scenario (Failed, 2013).

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The revolutionaries became the masters of the street politics against the dictators in the Arab awakening. The outside powers supported the overthrow of the regimes through hard power or through provoking the street power and then used the Islamic affinity of the people to establish the secular Islamic regimes that promote secular state over the *Sharia* law. This provoked the Islamists to pursue power through hard ways and waged war in those countries where the regime was not in full control of the ground situation like Libya and Egypt (Sinai). The war in Iraq created an opportunity for the Islamists to control ground and announce the creation of Islamic State and practice of *Sharia* law (Lynch, M. 2011).

The street power was used by secular Islamists parties to topple the regime and this power was used to won the post dictatorial elections. The Islamists dreaming for the revival of *Sharia* law opposed the new established regimes and started military struggle against the regimes resulting in the clash between the secularists and the Islamists. The clash of the opposing ideologies created a state of chaos in many Arab countries like Yemen, Iraq, Syria, Egypt and Libya (Bayat, A. 2013).

The Islamists used the street power in pursuing the post-revolutionary election and got success in post dictatorial elections in many countries like Egypt and Tunisia. They used Mosques and religious gatherings at neighborhood level in mobilizing the free riders and secured high votes in elections. The revolutions were successful in bringing new faces to power but were unsuccessful in changing the system

in countries like Egypt and Tunisia. The basic institutes of the old establishments like the judiciary, security apparatus, state media, and political network of powerful business circles, cultural organizations and the powerful military remained unaltered. So the Arab Spring remained a different form of revolution where it didn't change the statuesque as revolutions bring about massive changes and overhauling of the system. The only exception is the Libyan revolution where NATO brought war, violence and destruction through military hardware and direct intervention. Most of the revolutions remained just a change of faces with no significant change or systemic alteration (Bayat, A.2013).

Muslim scholars like *Sayyid Qutb* inspired the Muslims youth to vehemently seize and refurbish the *Jahili* (Ignorant) state and establish an Islamic State based on the principals of Quran and Prophetic methodology. His book *Ma'alim fi al-Tariq* (The Mile Stones 1964) was a guide line for the jihadists and played the same role as Lenin's "*What is to Be Done*" (1902) for the Marxist. The jihadists are determined to bring the revolution through seizing power against the *Jahili* (Ignorant) system (Walt, Yigal, 2012).

Islamists can be divided into three categories on the basis of their aspiration to implement *Sharia* law and their struggle for power in the Middle East.

Secular Islamists

These are people who love and perform Islamic practices in their individual life and desire to be virtuous with the power in their hand. They contain the secular parties and want to preserve the statuesque and don't want to revise the customary system. Tunisian *Ennahda* and Palestinian *Hamas* are the best examples of secular of Islamists.

Reformist Islamists

These are Islamists who desire to be part of the existing system and want to bring measured change in the system. These parties are working for slow reform in the system and integrate Islam with the democratic system. They are in favor of the merged Islamic and secular system. Muslim Brotherhood is a best example of the steady change to an Islamic political system.

Revolutionary Islamists

These are Islamists following the teachings of *Ibne Tammiya* and *Sayyid Qutb*. They want to bring Islamic system by eradicating the capitalist system. They are against the capitalist installed system. They

favor the uprooting of the tyrant regimes and are challenging the world order. They want to implement *sharia* in its true spirit. Islamic State is the symbol of such type of revolutionary Islamists (Shaqroun, Nizar 2011).

Implications

The use of Islamic rhetoric in the Arab Spring has long term implications for the region in particulars and for the world in general. The Islamic rhetoric was used to ignite the spirit of agitation in Muslim youth that turned back and many militant Islamists organizations were formed, as a result the region went into persistent chaos and civil war. Islamic rhetoric also resulted in maximizing the rift in Muslims communities like the increased violence between various schools of thoughts. Sectarian violence has turned into a full fledged war between Sunnis and Shiites like the case of Iraq, Syria and Yemen etc. The civil war resulted in huge influx of refugees from the Arab world to the Europe that created *Islamophobic* response in Europe and a new humanitarian crisis in the world. Islamic State has emerged in the Arab Spring and now it has spread to all over the Muslim world challenging the global dominance of secularists.

CONCLUSION

The Arab spring was an effort to overhaul the existing system because of its malfunctioning, while the common individual participated in the uprising because of the suppressive nature of the regimes. Islamic system was considered to be the best alternative to the existing regimes although the demonstrators could not anticipate the outcome of the uprising still Islamic slogans, Friday prayers, Friday sermons and Quranic verses were used to achieve the aspirations. Some countries observed a short-lived rule of the Islamists like the Egyptians but the tables were turnover in favor of the hegemonic powers which is the dilemma of the Muslim world. The Islamic Rhetoric was used as motivating factor to inspire the demonstrators although this factor was used just to help increase the momentum of the agitation while behind the curtain forces were getting their own objectives.

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