



Arab Spring and its Legacies
Edited by Mujib Alam and Sujata Ashwarya
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The book “Arab Spring and its Legacies”, edited by Prof. Mujib Alam and Prof. Sujata Ashwarya is an outcome of discussions held at an online conference titled, ‘*Turmoil and Instability in West Asia: Implication for India’s Look West Policy*’. The conference was funded by Council of Social Science Research and hosted at Jamia Millia Islamia University in January 2021. The book is an attempt to examine the enduring impacts, the ‘legacies’, the failures, and the realities of the historic democratic upsurge in the West Asian region in the early 2010s. The dissatisfaction with decades of political repression by the authoritarian leaders, economic insecurities and social repression resulted in the widespread protests across the region. The chapters oscillates from assessing the historical past of the West Asian region to the emerging trends on the geopolitical slide. The chapters revolve around the legacies of the uprisings that left enduring imprints on the political, social and the cultural aspects of the West Asian countries.

The book began with a chapter by Kingshuk Chatterjee, stressing on the multiple aspects of the Arab Spring ranging from assessing the causes to the quick fall of the uprisings. The uprisings were followed by a scorching summer rather than the winter, the harshness of which is still apparent in the West Asian region. In view of Chatterjee, instabilities had become a persistent characteristic of West Asia, the region has not returned to its pre 2011 levels of stability. Libya, Yemen, and Syria that were majorly sparked by the uprisings, are in persistent state of civil wars that had prevented them from achieving democracy and stability. While the Arab countries that escaped the civil war, either pursued repressive policies or gradually implemented the reforms to

suppress the protests. Chatterjee argues that the ingrained nature of authoritarianism historically and culturally, was one of the reasons for the failure of the uprisings. The world was quick to judge the success of the uprisings, that fall abruptly. The reverting back to military rule as was in the case of Egypt was another striking aspect of the uprisings. It was only in case of Tunisia that survive the scorching summer in the years following the uprisings. However, the recent events in Tunisia had witnessed a negative trends towards democratisation.

The chapter by Priyamvada A. Sawant extensively discusses the events of the uprisings, the historical aspects of the India-West Asia relations and India's response to the Arab world's democratic upsurge. India adopted a non-interventionist policy during the upsurge, ensuring the safe evacuation of millions of Indian diaspora in the region. Instead of adopting a common or consistent stance to the uprisings, it had a country specific approach.

The chapters by Özden Zeynep Oktav, Sukalpa Chakrabarti and Abu Zafar revolves around the Syrian crisis. The Syrian civil war that began during the Arab Spring, 2011 has only intensified over the time. The sectarian strife among the regional and extra-regional powers, has pushed Syria in a complex strategic mess and a ground of proxy wars. Sukalpa Chakrabarti's chapter primarily focus on analysing the impact of Syrian civil war on its relations with India. The present Indian government is expanding its strategic presence in Syria to counter the growing influence of China and Pakistan in the region and to contain the spread of terrorism. She stresses on how the tactful use of soft power and economic development gives India a strategic leverage in de-escalating tensions in Syria.

Vrushal T. Ghoble evaluates the legitimacy crisis that Saudi Arabia faced in the period following the Arab Uprisings. The wealthy gulf monarchies in every possible way suppressed the uprisings, either through military repression or economic handouts to discourage dissent. As Chatterjee highlighted, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Bahrain and Jordan witnessed systematic crackdown, with a strong resistance to any sign of dissent within the political system. The chapter further evaluates the notable social and cultural reforms in the Kingdom since Muhammad Bin Salman became the crown prince. The Crown Prince has been gradually liberalising the conservative Kingdom, attempting to establish a reconciliation between religion and society. Saudi is faced with multiple

challenges, juggling with religious backlash against liberal reforms, regional instabilities over Houthis with Iran, and normalisation deals with Israel that has irritated Muslims. The chapter vaguely highlights the changing dynamics of US-Saudi ties that has been a crucial foreign policy challenge for Saudi in post-2011 era.

The volume further delves into the rise of sectarianism and sectarian conflicts in the post-Arab Spring period as a significant legacy of the uprisings. Sectarianism constitute a major source of instability in the West Asian region, specifically in Syria, Iraq, Libya and Yemen. The pro-democracy protests instilled a fear in the region's stable regimes that these revolutions would unseat them, sectarianism helped them to strengthen their authoritarian regimes like in the case of Bahrain and Iraq. The sectarianism and the emergence of non-state armed entities has widened the security concerns. Sujata Ashwarya and Mohammed Saleem's extensive discussion on the emergence of Hezbollah as a 'prominent sub-state actor, fuelling sectarianism that is assisting in the maintenance of authoritarianism. They argue that post-2011 Hezbollah's increasing political power with support from Iran, has not only redefined its position in the Levant region, but caused concerns among the *Sunni* regimes, due to the shifting regional balance in favour of *Shia* axis.

Md. Aftab Ahmed contextualises the role and revolution in Arabic literature during the uprisings. In view of Arab writers, the Arab uprisings were an outcome of powerful Arabic literature. The Arab literature inspired the young Arabs to express their outrage against decades of injustices. The chapter further highlights how the democratic upsurge has revolutionise the Arab literature, where writers and poets have become sensitive towards the socio-political issues. They feel more free to express themselves, instilling a sense of optimism about the future of Arab literature. In words of Ahmed, 'there is debate on the success of Arab Spring in achieving its goals, but it has brought a spring in the Arab's literary world and culture'. Adil Rasheed in the final chapter compares the aftermath of Arab Spring to the period following the French Revolution. He expounds how the protests against poverty, unemployment withered in the heat of sectarian strife and civil wars. But Rasheed believes that it will be too early to denounce the uprisings, although the protests have stalled but somewhere they had slightly shaken the authoritarian regimes.

In spite of the book's aforementioned contribution, it falls short of providing a more complete picture of the legacies of the uprisings. The divergent themes of the chapters at certain junctures seems to deviate from the central theme of the book. Despite that, the volume is an easy read for those interested in understanding the 2011 uprisings, and the detailing render it an appealing source for those seeking a comprehensive grasp of the Arab spring and its legacies. It had in some sense, meticulously captured the essence of 'what Arab Spring was and what it wasn't'.
