

Book Review

Islamism: What it Means for the Middle East and the World by Tarek Osman. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016

Tarek Osman an eminent scholar of political Islam and an expert on Middle Eastern politics provides an insightful analysis of Islamist movements in the Middle East. In which he explores the Islamist response to the secularization attempts that were envisioned and imposed from the top and argues the Islamists responses to the secularization thesis varied. For him some Islamist groups started as social and educational organizations, and later evolved into political ones like Muslim Brotherhood .Other Islamist groups entering into or shunning politics; and in espousing or condemning the use of violence. Condensing the ideological variation among certain Islamist groups. He also described the models espoused by militant organizations and mainstream Islamists. The author persistently points out the central thesis, Islamism and traces its trajectory. The event of the downfall of the Ottoman Empire in 1922, he reminds us, was a huge historical epoch: marking the end of the last Islamic caliphate, which had, previously, had wide recognition in Turkey, North Africa, and the eastern Mediterranean (p.1). In the aftermath of this, Islamism has experienced a serious crisis of identity as he argues the most conspicuous of the political Islamist groups in the Arab world seemed to have settled into accepting the political order in their countries (p.8) which is secular in nature and working within this framework is to give credence to the secular nature of political order.

He further discusses how the vacuum created by the Arab uprising in the region that allowed militant Islamism. In which the ISIS being the most dangerous and wealthy of these groups — have, according to author: “managed to carve out a social presence that is unprecedented in modern Arab history” (p.72). However, it must be noted, his numerous insights stems largely from Egyptian, Tunisian and Morocco’s Justice and Development Party (PJD) experiences argues that the failure of the elected Islamist government in Egypt exposed the inability of Islamists to comprehend the intricacies of governance. In his words ‘the “Arab Spring” imploded into social polarization, chaos and internal conflict, (p. 98) that the Islamist failed to capitalize the chance of coming to power. This portion of the book is rich in discussion but leaves unaddressed several factors that are responsible for Islamists ‘fell from power’. Furthermore, he sees the thrive of islamists in Egypt due to the failure of the secularists in producing basic level leadership who can articulate the resentment of the people and stand up to the despotic regimes(p.112).

He dedicates two chapters to theorizing whether or not Turkish or Iranian Islamism can be desirable models for the Arab world. At this point he provides superficially histories of the Islamic Revolution of Iran and the rise of the Justice and Development Party of Turkey (AKP) and argues, for millions of Islamists across the Arab world, Erdogan and his Justice and Development Party (AKP) had come to represent the ultimate political success they had dreamt of. In slightly over a decade, that party, led by that man, had come to dominate the

politics of the one country in the Islamic world that, for three-quarters of a century, had been subject to a highly assertive programme of secularization and de-Islamization. So too, the fact that the AKP's rise to power and consolidation of authority were far from easy further inspired Arab Islamists; many looked to the AKP's experience as a model to emulate (p.161). He further provides analysis of both Islamist modals and predicts how they would sustain in Arab states. The predictions are substantiated by evidence, but he fails to mention the challenges posed by secularists and Kurds to Turkish modal. However, his perception on whether or not the Iranian or Turkish models could work in the Arab world—where he claims that the AKP's model is unsustainable, and that the Arab Islamist model may have a better chance in Iran seems less convincing. In a chapter titled "Islamism and the West," he place emphasis on how west perceives insufficiently Islamism this led to the Islamists to see the West as unreliable. Because in the second and third tiers of the Muslim Brotherhood's leadership believed that the US and some European countries condoned the Brotherhood's removal from power. They repeatedly argued that the West 'has a veto against an Islamic government in the Arab world'. The same view was increasingly shared by famous sheikhs with huge followings, who reminded the hundreds of thousands of their listeners, whether in mosques or on YouTube channels, that the US and Europe, which claimed to be the guardians of democratic values, 'were hypocrites who would not follow through on their rhetoric, especially when it comes to defending Islam' (p.233). The concluding chapter is a succinct overview of narratives of Islamist groups. In which author argues that within various Arab Islamist groups, there is a strong narrative that the events of the years between 2011 and 2015 have confirmed the 'duplicity of the liberals'. Despite the major social polarizations that their countries have witnessed in the last five years, many Islamists have arrived at the conclusion that the 'liberals' who, for decades, championed liberal democracy were the first to betray its tenets when they (the Islamists) won (p.241). In this sense, he argues the Arab uprisings signaled the failure of 'Arab liberals and socialists' and marked the beginning of the 'Islamists' age'.

This book indeed represents a significant effort to contribute to the existing body of literature pertaining to Islamism and its future in Middle East and is at length helpful for scholars interested in the field of Islamism and Middle Eastern politics. However, it overlooked the place of politics in religion which is a crucial for knowing the trajectory of Islamism and points out Islamism as only the political trend but the question is that Islamism is not only a political trend, refers both a religious as well as political trend which advocates reforming society according to the founding texts of Islam, and a following movement, which calls on Muslims to resist against secularization thesis and replace it with an Islamization project.

Reviewed by **Showkat Ahmad Wagay**, Research Scholar, Department of Islamic Studies, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, India

Email: showkatwagayamu@gmail.com
