

BOOK REVIEW

Globalisation or Gobbleisation: The Arab Experience
by **Dr. Ash Narain Roy,**
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It is one of the few fascinating and rare works that examines the implications of globalisation on the Arab world. In this context author has highlighted some of the critical questions that analyse the western perspective that projects Arab world as fanatic particularly in the wake of 9/11 attack on the US. It gives comprehensive overview of the Arab world; how it is diverse and not homogenous and is critical of treating Islam as synonymous with terrorism. The author talks about the development of terrorism in Arab but also maintains that it does not enjoy popular support within the Arab world. It also points out the Christian crusades and other rising fundamentalist forces in different parts of the world.

The author maintains that Islam is not monolithic and it is not just a religion but also a civilization. He has explained the reasons for westerner's negative impression of the Arab world and Arab's resistance to globalisation that emphasizes the need of economic and political transformation in these countries. In this regard Arabian perception of globalization is well developed. The study focuses on why Liberalization process is so slow in the Arab world. It also develops debate about whether democratization is essential for capitalist development and if not as the South East Asian experience shows then why westerners are emphasizing the need for this transformation. The impediments in this process are explained in this regard.

As the main focus of this study is on Globalization, The author discusses the different intricacies of globalization. The globalization is considered as a myth, an old wine in a new bottle. Some refer to it as different type of colonialism. Globalization is referred to as slippery and dangerous. In this connection it is explored whether globalization is synonymous with Americanization? The study points out that the US behavior in the new global order is marooned in the cold war mindset and unfortunately the world community is getting used to its arrogance of power.

It is a dangerous development, as the lack of some kind of balancing force will enable US to monopolies the entire international system. The US policies in Arab since 1990s are indicative of US branding any country not having amicable relationship with US as rogue and punish it within or outside the UN. It signifies that western world is using globalization as an ideology to change

the political and economic systems of different countries of the world in order to bring the entire international system under its influence.

One of the reasons for Arabs to oppose globalization is cultural. They fear losing their cultural identity. It is quite paradoxical that on the one hand the champions of democratization and post modernism are emphasizing the significance of diversity and rights of self-determination by local people, on the other hand globalization is seeking to advance a uniform culture. The western food and fashion is penetrating fast into the third world and it is distorting their own cultural values and civilization. It is called cultural invasion. It is a pity that it is only one-way traffic. Only the western values are proliferating and non-western values are getting marginalized or diminishing fast.

In this study it is highlighted that Arabs perceive it as a threat and are becoming proactive to protect their cultural values. The exposure to western world and life style through media is further creating turbulence in these societies as people in these societies also aspire for the same kind of life style but the gap between aspirations and actualization of such aspirations create frustration among youth in these countries. In order to legitimize their power, rulers in these countries create aggressive or negative nationalism. In some of the Arabian countries the religious heads and military officials are more influential and they create fanaticism in their educated youth in order to control power.

The main challenge to the third world in general and Arab in particular is to economically modernize without culturally westernizing. The author explores that democracy and capitalism are not necessarily interlinked. The third world societies do not possess the socio- political infrastructure and the socio- political basis on which democracy could flourish. It is maintained that capitalism does not necessarily produce democracy and democracy is not always a pre condition for market economy.

The western analysts on the Arab world in fact draw heavily on classical writings as well as the rhetoric and ideology of contemporary Islamists movements. It is wrong to generalize the entire Arab under one brand as the existing reality is that different Arab states practice different type of politics depending on socio- economic development and political culture. Here the author makes a detailed study of Kuwait. He maintains that the Arab world may be united by history and religion and may share values, attitudes and institutions that bind them together but it is not homogenous. It is also wrong to paint Arab as traditional, conservative and backward. The Arab world is changing with the process that has its own momentum. The work however does not mention anything about westernization and capitalization and its implications on the position of women and how it is perceived as a threat by the Islamic countries.

The author refutes the western view that neither Islam nor the Arab has had a democratic tradition. Such view is considered as too simplistic and paternalistic that fails to take into account the historical and cultural context. Those ignorant about history treat Islam an object of fear and hostility. In his opinion Islam is a modern phenomena. It is neither antithetical to democracy nor monolithic. He quotes A.R.Olayi as 'it is not Islam that contains undemocratic elements but it is western democracy that contains un-Islamic elements'. Islam as a religion and as a complete way of life encourages the practice of democracy in all its ramifications. While tracing the historical

facts, author notes that it was the Ottoman rule that impeded the growth of democratic institutions in the Arab world since early 20th century. It was the European colonial operation that did not allow the development of the democratic nation states. Other factors that impeded the development of democratic institutions are the influence of tribal chiefs, religious leaders and military officials and the weak civil society in these countries. Some of the Arab states claim that they can provide more social and distributive justice to their people than the western societies.

The contemporary maligned image of Islam is the result of rise of Islamic radicalism that has transformed political Islam into neo- fundamentalism. Its growth is phenomenal and has taken the path of violence and terror. One of the reasons for the rise of extremism is the lack of charismatic rulers in the Arab politics who have very little to offer to the new generation of politically deprived Arabs. They are trying to create their solace in Islam. The slogans created by such leaders like 'we are neither socialist nor capitalist but Muslims' try to generate strong feeling to have distinct identity. The Israel factor in the post cold war era is not clearly explained nor the Osama bin Laden's influence and implications in Arab politics are mentioned in specific. The role of US strategy in the development of terrorism during second cold war could also be mentioned to explain the linkage that how Arab world is not solely responsible for mushrooming of Taliban and other terrorist outfits. In order to show the weakness of terrorism and neo fundamentalism it is mentioned how Taliban regime has exposed its hollowness (after 9/11 attack) of their self-serving claim that 'this is a trial by god and we will prevail'. It is also mentioned that violent Isalmists do not have popular support.

Though western opposition to such neo-fundamentalism in the Arab world is mentioned by the author it is worth noting the role of civil society in the US and the western world who are opposed to the US strategy to deal with such forces. In their opinion US aggressive policies may not help in evolving a more peaceful world. There had been protests in the US as well as in the western world against Bush Administration's decision to attack Afghanistan and Iraq. These westerners feel that Arab feeling to maintain identity should be respected and their fear of vulnerability should be understood.

One of the factors that united the entire Arab world despite several diversities was the Israel factor. In the post cold war period this unity of Islamic world is further solidified due to the western misleading interpretations of certain developments there. In a way Samuel Huntington's clash of civilization had done maximum damage to international peace and security by projecting Islam as a threat. It generated utter feeling of insecurity among Islamic people all over the world and united them as a single force against a common enemy 'Christian world.' It contributes to turbulence in the Arab world and leaves the US and the world around more insecure than ever. The US is trying to build strategic defense systems, NMD, to deal with such menace. Whether US would be able to secure itself or make the world more insecure by developing such defense shield is yet to be seen. These systems might increase the urge to develop weapons of mass destructions among economically and militarily less powerful countries. The US intends to secure itself by developing defense umbrella while making other countries more vulnerable to its attack. Such device would enable US to fight and win nuclear war. Such assumptions create insecurities among nations and are bound to lead to nuclear proliferation. Thus the fast globalising world is bound to face strategic competition and political fragmentations.

The basic argument of the work clearly reflects that Arabs perspective on globalization is overwhelmingly negative. Islamists perceive westernization and modernization as a threat. Nationalists and leftists perceive it as incompatible with their nationalist aspirations.