A Journey from Political Islam to Muslim Democrats: An Appraisal of Tunisian Al-Nahda Movement and Global Perspective
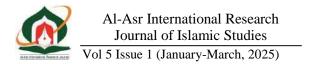
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Abstract

The Al-Nahda movement, of Tunisia founded in the 1960s, emerged as a response to the challenges of modernity and colonial legacies in the Muslim world. Initially rooted in traditional religious values and resistance to secular authoritarian regimes, the movement underwent significant transformations over time. These changes have led to both internal debates and external perceptions, shaping the movement's role in the field of political Islam and the broader socio-political context. The Al-Nahda movement, based in Tunisia, has been a prominent player in rest of the world, as a benchmark for advocating both social and political change. By adopting the Case Study method and examining the movement's historical trajectories, ideological shifts, and engagement with modernity, this study seeks to offer a forward-looking perspective on the potential directions the Al-Nahda movement. The analysis will take into account various factors, including the movement's adaptation to changing political landscapes through a strategy shift from political Islam to Muslim democrats, its approach to governance and interaction with global socio-political trends. Recent coup by President Kais Said and his imposed bans on the Movement and political arena of

Tunisia emerged a new phenomenon which requires a cutting-edge investigation.

Keywords: Political Islam, Muslim Democrats, Al-Nahda Movement, Rashid Al-Ghannouchi, Presidential Coup.
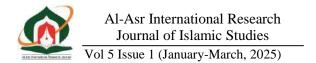
Introduction

As per latest statistics, Tunisia is a country having 12.37 million populations.[1] Tunisia is homogeneous society with 98% Muslim population. Most of them are following the Sunni Maliki school of thought, however no conflict between the norms, ethnicity and religion among the society. Islamic movement of Al-Nnahda was formed by Shaikh Rashid Ghannouchi in 1981 to revive Arab Islamic identity. Al-Nahda was not allowed by military regime to work freely till the revolution in the name of Arab Spring, which was rooted and initiated in Tunisia. In dictatorial regime movement focused on preaching Islam, welfare and educational activities to strengthen Islamic identity and values of people. Arab awakening provided Al-Nahda to participate in country's politics. Al-Nahda is the largest political party of Tunisia, which was being part of the government since 2011. However, in 2016 Al-Nahdah changed its policy by focusing solely on politics rather than social, welfare and educational activities. The Movement was thinking that cultural and religious identity was no longer a priority now because the constitution of Tunisia protects Islamic Arabic identity of the country. The challenge faced by Al-Nahda in Tunis was the process of democratization and implementation of principles, values and mechanism of democracy in country. Al-Nahda has approved comprehensive strategy to overcome the challenges faced by Tunisia, such as pursuing transitional justice, reforming of state institutions, enacting economic reforms of spur growth, creating multidimensional approach to

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[1] https://countrymeters.info/en/Tunisia#population_2024 (Accessed on 8/1/2024 1:36am)

fight against terrorism and promoting good governance in the institutions. Al-Nahda was trying to play its pivotal role in public sphere from Muslim perspective. Al-Nahda has defined sole purpose to get power and represent Islam like Erdogan did in Turkeye.
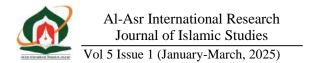
The next step towards paradigm shift to Muslim democrats from political Islam, by separating Mosque administration as a regime and the affairs of the ruling party as Rashid Ghannouchi stated "our objective is to separate political and religious fields because religion should be nonpartisan". Al-Nahda desires to make the Mosques to be a place for people to come together, not a site of division. Al-Nahda seeks to create solutions of day-to-day problems rather than preach about the hereafter. These were the steps which have taken by Al-Nahda as Islamic movement to Muslim democrat's party because Rashid Ghannouchi stated that **"Al-Nnahda is now best understood not as an Islamic movement but as a party of Muslim democrats"**.

The Al-Nahda movement's historical journey has been marked by shifts in ideology and strategy. From its early days as a religious revivalist movement, it gradually moved towards political activism, engaging in efforts to challenge oppressive regimes and promote democratic governance. The movement's experiences in both opposition and participation within the political sphere have shaped its perspectives on power, authority, and governance.

Scholarly discourse on political Islam, the Al-Nahda movement, and its evolution within a futuristic framework has yielded significant insights, yet certain gaps remain. Existing literature primarily focuses on the historical development of the Al-Nahda movement, its role in Tunisian politics, and its ideological transformations. However, a comprehensive analysis of the

movement's journey through the lens of diversity, encompassing its response to modernity, internal debates, and potential future directions, is still relatively underexplored.
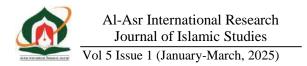
Basic themes and gap of the study

1. **Historical Evolution**: Numerous studies have explored the origins and historical evolution of the Al-Nahda movement, highlighting its transition from a religious revivalist movement to a political force within Tunisia's democratization process.
2. **Engagement with Modernity**: Research has discussed the movement's use of modern tools like media and technology, but often from a tactical perspective, without delving deeply into how this engagement shapes its ideological core.
3. **Ideological Shifts**: The literature analyzes the Al-Nahda movement's ideological adaptations in response to changing socio-political contexts, including its approach to issues such as women's rights and governance.

While these studies offer valuable insights, there is a gap in the literature regarding a holistic examination of the Al-Nahda movement's diversity in its journey. This entails a comprehensive exploration of how the movement navigates diverse challenges and opportunities posed by modernity while remaining rooted in its Islamic identity.

Furthermore, the literature has addressed less extensively the movement's potential future directions and its role in shaping the broader discourses of political Islam. The Tunisian Al-Nahda movement's journey through diverse phases of evolution within the realm of political Islam underscores its adaptability, ideological flexibility, and resilience. As it navigates the intricate interplay between tradition and modernity, the movement's trajectory will be influenced by its ability to address internal and external challenges while

remaining true to its core values. Understanding the dynamics of the Al-Nahda movement's past and present provides valuable insights into its potential pathways in a futuristic perspective, contributing to the broader understanding of political Islam's evolution.
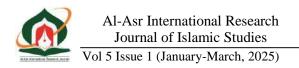
There was systematic oppression and repression against Political forces before the Arab Spring in Tunisia. Al-Nahda as a political party was not able to participate in country's elections, although its members individually participated in the elections several times. However Arab spring has brought end of long authoritarian regime and opened new political transition. There was a dire need for political reforms to conduct county's first free, transparent and representatives' election after the collapse of decade long aristocracy. Interim government formulated a committee to revise the constitution and electoral laws for election which were initially scheduled in mid July 2011. Al-Nahda played very vital role in the process of political transformation and appears so far as very a moderate voice. Rashid Ghannouchi, the co-founder and ideologue of Al-Nahda stated in various interviews that for the sake of democratic process in the country, our party will work with other political forces and support democratic process which was prevailing in country.[2] National constituent assembly (NCA) elections delayed for three months due to electoral reforms. On October 2011 Tunisian people voted in the general elections after nine months struggle of toppling the regime. In this first free and fair elections, Al-Nahda emerged as strongest political force in the country by winning 89 seats of NCA, and obtained 37.04 percent of total casted votes.[3] Al-Nahda has formulated collation government with

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[2] Paciello, Cristina, Maria, Changes and Challenges of political transition, MEDPRO, 2011, P 15-21

[3] NDI, Final report on the Tunisian national constituent assembly elections, 2011, P 20
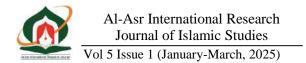
secular parties ***Ettakatol*** and the ***Congress for the Republic (CPR)*** to strengthen and carry forward democratic process. It is the reality that political transition in country has been attributed by the ability of Al-Nahda and Nida Tounes, ruling parties of the country to overcome their differences and developing consensuses in several times. After two years the polarization between Islamic and secular parties marked on high level after the assassination of two popular secular leaders Chokri Belaid and Mohammad Brahmi resulting protests and opposition threats to resign from the assembly and interrupt constitution development which forced Al-Nahda to quiet from the government and formation of independent technocratic government. In the upcoming general elections of 2014, *Nida Tounes* won 86 while Ennahdah secured 69 seats. Rashid Ghannouchi accepted the results and allowed *Nida Tounes* to form the new government.[4] During this crucial period, the country's social, economic and political condition was not up to the mark but the movement was acting as a responsible and cooperative force. In 2019 general elections, Al-Nahda once again obtained majority among other political parties and secured 52 seats of national constituent assembly. Now the main target of Al-Nahda was to strengthen democratic process and lead to country for better socio-economic condition. As a result of this election, Rashid Al-Ghannouchi elected speaker of the parliament, which is one of the most influential portfolios of the country. All opponents of the movement joint their hands to prove Al-Nahda as a failure in the sphere of the government. Despite their efforts best to stream line the country's socio-economic situation, Mr. Ghannouchi faced a no confidence move against him in 2020 and survived his position as speaker of the parliament

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[4] Esposito, L. John, Sonn.Tamara, Voll, O. John, Islam and Democracy After the Arab spring, Oxford University Press, 2016, ch. 7, p199
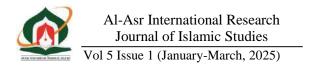
with very close margin. Presidential elections were another milestone in the democratic history of Tunisia, when Kais Saed won the election in second round with the support of Al-Nahda. In July, 2021 Kais Saed revived again the authoritarian legacy of the country and dissolved the parliament. Al-Nahda movement was again in turmoil of imposed bans and as a result, Mr. Ghannouchi was arrested in 2021 and facing narrative allegations of supporting Jihad, money laundering and activities against the country. Authoritarian regimes do not value his exile of almost 20 years and intend to remain the movement and its leadership ousted from the democratic and electoral process. The question arises here that amid compromises and paradigm shifts from traditional stand of the movements, why they are not valued and given space to contribute in the positive change in their homelands by the power holders? It seems that Al-Nahda made Turkey's Erdogan, a benchmark for its future endeavor. It is worth mentioning that same type of coup was faced by AK Party Turkeye in 2016 but fortunately, the coup was not proved successful because of masses support and fight against the military coup. Nowadays, The Al-Nahda movement and its leadership is not allowed by the Tunisian government to participate actively in the social and political sphere.

Al-Nahda's journey from Political Islam to Muslim Democrats

Al-Nahda's internal debate weather politics or preaching has opened in 2011. However, it was not easy for Al-Nahda to adopt new identity as Muslim democrats. Its participation in politics influenced its ideology and when Al-Nahda became ruling party in the country which forced it to negotiate contentious challenges and make compromises for the sake of democracy. Meanwhile, Muslim Brotherhood's government in Egypt was toppled by the military regime.

Al-Nahda realized that to preserve democracy in Tunisia and protect itself against a fate similar to its fellow Islamists in Egypt they have to make compromises with secularists which were unprecedented in Tunisian politics. During the national dialogue regarding constitution, Al-Nahda compromised on the issues such as blasphemy, gender equality, sharia as source of legislation and on freedom of belief etc. Due to Al-Nahda's concessions, constitution was passed by the assembly which paves the ways of restoration of the democracy and formation of the government. This new constitution was a mega event towards recognition and acceptance as party for Al-Nahda as party leader stated that since the establishment of the movement in 1981, we have been waiting for legal recognition and succeeded after 2011 revolution. For long time we were second class citizens and this created barriers between us and society. However, Al-Nahda's origins in political Islam have made the party an outlier in Tunisian society, and many people were feeling difficult to accept the party as a normal political actor. Later on, Al-Nahda's Washington DC based international republican institute conducted a survey which outlined that movement's voters perceive Islam as a key role in government. This figure was decreased dramatically from 84 percent to 62 percent in 2017. These results were also enforcing Al-Nahda to accept new identity. A Tunisian political expert stated that,

> **"Ennahda seems to be keen to progressively abandon religion. This might be good for Ennahda as political party, but it could backfire. It would have been far better both for the country and for Ennahda if it undertook a reform of religious interpretation toward a more innovative and modernist understanding. Al-Nahda can leave political Islam, but Islam is still there, and it's still important for many Tunisians".[5]**

[5] Meddeb, Hamza, Ennahda's uneasy exit from political Islam, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2019, P 7-20

Thus, it was not an easy task for Al-Nahda, because the leadership of the party was of the view that exiting from political Islam could create vacuum and would benefit the party and the followers and the country. However, the 2016 general congress has decided Al-Nahda's way forward and they accepted to focus only on elections and initiated the recruitment procedure to welcome outside workers, who were interested in political activism. In upcoming municipal council elections, Al-Nahda adapted strategy of openness which appealed conservatives, individuals, upper middle class and social groups to pursue their political career under Al-Nahda umbrella. Al-Nahda accepted applications of highly qualified candidates as stated one of Al-Nahda's leader
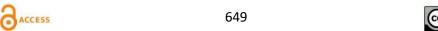
"We tried to attract people who have skills, who have expertise in managing local affairs; it was also attempt to realize those who were the part of previous regime that we are not against you rather we are against the oppressive system which banned freedom, justice in country".[6]

Due to this policy of candidness, Al-Nahda won 30 percent of municipal seats in 2018 elections, and half of the winning candidates were independent who did not formally join the party. Despite all electoral openness, the internal structure of Al-Nahda was still an obstacle to expand the party. In concluding, we can state that after viewing Al-Nahda's ongoing transition process, this was a benchmark for all other Islamic movements around the globe to win the election by transforming their ideology and organization.
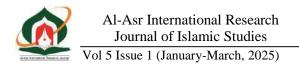
Introduction and characteristics of Political Islam

Political Islam means a segment of Islam which is political and in a comparison with another type of Islam which is not political. So, political is

[6] Ibid P 7-20

something different from the actual understanding of Islam. Political Islam is mainly related to political movements or parties founded in the beginning of twentieth century which are mainly related to Muslim brotherhood in Middle East and *Jamaat e Islami* in sub-continent. In recent years, concept and term of political Islam was mainly used in negative way and so it has negative connotation as it is different from what might be understood and perceived from Islam as religion. So, the term political Islam connote a concept addition to Islam as a religion and it is related within political sciences to negative connotation as being mainly violent and as variable of instability with society and towards modern states. The term political Islam was mainly coined and used to connect these meanings.

In contrary, the ideology of political Islam helps Muslims to create and secure their Muslim identity, symbols of Unity, solidarity and pride. Political Islam also awards Muslims a sense of critique on contemporary authoritarian coders, power-driven regimes as well on Western imperialism and political philosophy. Political Islam has the capability to answer some emerging questions such as what happens in the world in Muslim perspective and what are our values? Which changes occur in the society and why? Ideologues of Political Islam have enough potential to answer these questions. One more important element of political Islam is that it makes capable to adopt the democracy and universal values like *AK* party in Turkeye, *Al-Nahda* in Tunisia, *Jamaat e Islami* in Pakistan and Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt.[7] Political Islam represents the ideology that religion and politics could not be separated. In other hand, the West has separated religion and the state and political Islam seems dangerous for

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[7] Fuller, Graham E. what future for political Islam, scientific study for govt. policy, 2004, p,18-25

Western ideology and civilization. The main characteristic of Islamic movements is that they interpret Islam as order of life (*Nizam e Islami*) and westerners has painted it with the term political Islam. In this connotation, political Islam claims that the state must be establish on theocracy and idealized the state of Medina which was established by the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and his successors. Political Islam has the ideology to establish an Islamic state upon the laws of Islam and its social system while state should play the role to propagate the message of Islam to mankind. One more characteristic of political Islamic movements was to invite the Muslims to true and pure Islam. Islam is not only a religion but is Deen (complete code of life) and it is fully integrated to economics, business, education, and military training as well as for sports and all other aspects of life and society. This ideology was stated by Hasan ul Banna, an ideologue and founder of Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood (MB),

"Muslims have a long-term goal to re-establish the Islamic Caliphate because it's a symbol of Unity"[8]
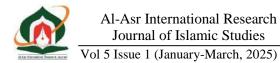
Political Islam believes that role of women in their society should be based on their natural and biological differences and the primary role of women is as a mother, wife and housekeeper. They have the ideology to remind Muslims their glorious past and educate them for present despair.

In Western connotation, the term political Islam is very loose, ambiguous and controversial, due to the mixture between different expressions of what is called political Islam and even radical and violent movements like Al Qaida is classified within the category of political Islam. Term political Islam has not been actually chosen by Muslims political actors and it is the intellectual product of the

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[8] Ataman, Kemal, Forerunners of Political Islam; An inquiry into the ideologies of Al-Banna and Al-Maududi, Uludag university, 2015, P 56-57

western scholar. It is already chosen by some western think tanks and media. So, we need to differentiate and to mark the line of distinction between radical and violent political groups in the name of Islam and Islamic movement or whatever you call Islamic revival movement in different countries all over the world. So, there is need to take a distance and differentiate between what is called and idealized as political Islam.
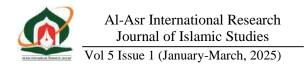
Characteristics of Muslim Democrats

Muslim democrats refer to individuals in societies who consider themselves as being Muslims and participating within public sphere through democratic means. So, there is total difference between political Islam and Muslim democrats. Political Islam can be understood as a holistic approach not only to the public sphere but even to the individual sphere. Muslim democrats refer to individual choice towards public sphere through democracy.

Muslim democrats describes that they are Muslims like anyone in the society and they have a role in public sphere in one or another area and there is another difference in Muslim democrats which projects Syed Qutab's approach towards society as we know that Syed Qutab has authored a book " *Jahiliya of 20th century*" so the main concept of that book he considers that Muslim societies in 20th century are not Muslims anymore and they live in *Jahiliya* time, and we need to bring them towards Islam, so that's why we do have the need of Dawah. The concept of dawah brings about the understandings an attitude towards society that we need to make an Islamic society, that is a radical approach towards society because Muslim democrats considers that we have a Muslim society but we need to have Islam being active in public sphere. So, the concept of political Islam is different to the concept of Muslim democrats and understands religion only being

active in secret sphere such as christens views it. Church has split universe into secrets, and the secrets' part lives in the church while all what is out of church is secular part. We have the understandings that we have everything secret and Allah has judge us in way and either will be punished and rewarded. So, the concept of Political Islam comes from a secular understanding of worldview which is mainly affected by the christen ideology. If you analyze christen ideology, they viewed Islam as secular religion and differentiate it in Deen and Dunya as written in their books.

Muslim democrats' methodology focuses on current political scenario and economic development of their countries respectively. Muslim democrats' emphasis is exclusively on politics rather than religious, social, educational and cultural activities. Furthermore, it can be observed as an apparent separation between religion and politics and an announcement "that religion should be non-partisan". In other words, Muslim Democrats represents a feeling that mosque should be a place where people come to joint and should not a place of division even in the name of politics. Muslim Democrats believe that by this act religion shall be no longer hostage to politics. Muslim democrats have the ideology to focus on economic developments in Muslim countries rather than to call their people for preaching. They thought that in contemporary world there is no issue of Muslim identity, and people across Muslim countries must have focus on economic development, employment, justice, and freedom of speech.[9] Muslim Democrats believe in an era of economic development and appreciate open social role of women and their equal opportunities to take part in government and business affairs. They (*Muslim Democrats*) believe that in democratic process

[9] Ghannouchi, Rashid, From Political Islam to Muslim Democracy: The Ennahda Party and the Future of Tunisia.Foreign Affairs, 2016, V 95(5), p 63-67

there should be equal gender representation from all segments of life. Muslim democrats also is reflecting the legacy of Islamic reformism since the 19th century, which is based on the combination between Islam and the mechanism of democracy which is seen as the instrumental political institutions and check and balance powers between the civil society and the state and the independence of judiciary system. These tools are seen as functional in different countries as well as Islamic frame work.

The basic goal of the foundation of Islamic movement in Tunis was to defend Arabic Islamic identity of the country, because the post-colonial president Habib Bourguiba had started political process of westernization and radical secularization in the country. So basic element was to protect Islamic identity and then by the time the movement assorted it with the demand of Islamic identity and democratization. So, it based on the insistence of defending the historical and religious identity of the Tunisia as well demanding for democratization. Habib Bourguiba was enlightened despotism and military personnel which had a project of modernization. Bin Ali, the second president and military ruler of the country who toppled the regime of Bourguiba in 1987. He assumed his aristocracy in the country until he was ousted by the masses in 2011 Arab Spring.

Literature Review

Mohammad Ayoub asserts in his multi-dimensional work, titled, **The Many Faces of Political Islam**[10] that political Islam has many faces even within the circles of one specific homeland. He defines political Islam with references from scholars of diverse background. He expresses political Islam in historical context from the thoughts of Imam Ghazali and Ibn e Tamiya. His assumptions

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[10]Mohammad Ayoob, *The Many Faces of Political Islam* (University of Michigan Press, 2008)

regarding contemporary political Islam favors a specific approach based on the opponent to the traditional Muslim approach of political endeavors. His assumption about violence and extra constitutional activities of Islamist activists to attain their ultimate goal of divine rule is also questionable, simply in the Muslim general perspective.

Asef Bayat edited the book titled, **Post-Islamism: Changing faces of political Islam**. The book contains 12 researches including introduction and two articles on Iran and Egypt, by the editor himself. Experts on Turkey, Morocco, Indonesia, Lebanon, Pakistan, KSA, Sudan and Syria's political climate has contributed their researches in the book. Basically, the writers are focusing on the qualitative turns of Islamic movements in their respective areas, according to the need of cutting edge political and social changes in the world. It is found that some more important works and areas, related to the contemporary political Islam's turns are missing. Tunisian model of political Islam is an example in this regard.[11]

Amit Pandya & Ellen Laipson edited the book titled, **"Islam and Politics: Renewal and Resistance in the Muslim World".** Diverse political and role of educational situation[12] in the countries like, Pakistan, Philippines, Thailand and Egypt are included in the book. In my view the book does not seem accomplishing the goal of its title, which require a more intensive depth of the topic.
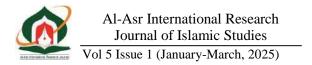
Kemal Ataman, a Turkish scholar from Faculty of Theology, ludağ University asserts in his study, **"Forerunners of "Political Islam": An inquiry**

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[11] Asef Bayat, *Post Islamism: The changing faces of political Islam*, (Oxford University Press, 2013)

[12] Amit Pandya & Ellen Laipson, "*Islam and Politics: Renewal and Resistance in the Muslim World*". (Washington, Stimson, 2009)

into the Ideologies of Al-Banna and Al-Mawdudi"[13] the commonalities as well as slight strategic contradictions among the leading Islamic resurgence movements of Muslim world, Muslim Brotherhood (Ikhwan al-Muslimoon) and Jamaat-e-Islami. He argues that ultimate goal, major outline of the theory and strategy are common among these two pioneer Islamic Movements and they possess role model and ideal for rest of the world, Islamic resurgence movements. In contrary, he extremely disagrees with the notion that following original and definite sources of Islam means that door of innovation and re-thinking values has been closed. He expresses, with maximum possible detail, ideological theories of Maulana Mawdudi and Imam Hasan Al-Banna, both the founders, as well as he comes with critique on both ones on the issues of modern approach, women rights, status of minorities in an Islamic state etc. The author, arguably, seems that he holds logical argumentation but his critique on the both renowned scholars and founder leaders of the movements shows his secular minded approach, particularly on some contemporary issues of the topic.

Political Islam: A Challenge to Islam in the Muslim World[14] is an important study on the topic conducted by five University teachers of Islamabad and KPK finds out "Political Islam" in the meaning of fundamentalism and concludes that Islam has no concern to it. The researchers, in their arguments, seem defensive while defining Islamic political theory. Simultaneously, they totally disagree with the Western approach of dividing Islam in different clusters like, Militant Islam, Political Islam, and Modern Islam etc. Their concern over the
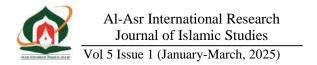
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[13]Kemal Ataman, *Forerunners of "Political Islam": An inquiry into the Ideologies of Al-Banna and Al-Mawdudi*
Uludağ Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi 24 (2015/2)
[14]Muhammad Salman, Arab Naz, Hazirullah,Waseem Khan, Irum Mughal and Umar Daraz, *Political Islam: A Challenge to Islam in the Muslim World,* Middle-East Journal of Scientific Research 17 (4): 465-471, (2013)

issue of illiterate Imams of the mosques of Muslim populations is also considerable but less generalizable.

Dilshod Achilov, a faculty member at Department of Political Science, International Affairs, and Public Administration, East Tennessee State University, conducted a quantitative study titled,"***Revisiting Political Islam: Explaining the Nexus between Political Islam and Contentious Politics in the Arab World***"[15]. He finds out that politically moderates (PM) are getting more massive support as compare to Politically Radicals (PR). He also analyses the role of political theory as a source of inspiration for political activists. Basically, his study paved a critical way for researchers on the topic because of its logical argumentation and proper research method. In contrary, it may be questioned that how we can draw clear lines PMs and PRs amid striving for the similar goal of Islamic political revolution.
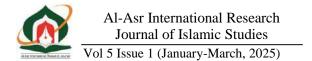
Tunisia in and after the Arab Spring

An important thing which we must discuss that was main causes behind Arab spring.First of all, the resentment of the people, because there was the gap between their aspiration and concrete reality. Tunisia is homogeneous society with very less sectarian division of Sunni and Malaki. It is very small society comprises more than 12 million people. They have more population of Young educated generation as inspirations for freedom and dignity, but regime of Bin Ali throttled these aspirations. So the masses and majority of the people have the feeling of such gaps between the concrete reality and the aspirations as what they are looking for. This gap has created lot of psychological, political and social

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[15]Dilshod Achilov, *"Revisiting Political Islam: Explaining the Nexus between Political Islam and Contentious Politics in the Arab World.* Social Science Quarterly*, The Southwestern Social Science Association (2016)*

diversion and it was reflected on the Tunisian revolution. But after the revolution Al-Nahda, as ruling party faced many problems like political and ideological polarization which may be called radical and secular division. One more issue which was faced by Al-Nahda was regional interventions because the Arab spring. There were regional actors which were combined by the based on the certain gulf countries and they were not happy with the democratic process and tried to intervene by the money and media to jeopardize the democratic and political process and to create difficulties and internal crises in the country.
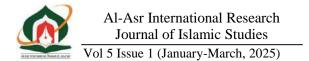
However, Al-Nahda controlled all these circumstances with patience and sacrifices to prevail democratic system in the country. Al-Nahda's historic transition from political Islam to Muslim Democrats was a move to designate the new identity of the party. People want to practice religion; the religious freedom has already been granted after the Tunisian revolution. But the challenge was related to the process of democratization, Muslim democrats meant that top priority lies to democratization in the country. The movement priorities to implement principles, values and mechanism of democracy in the country. Actually Al-Nahda was performing the role of vanguard for this process.

Transitions of Islamic Movement of Tunisia and Global Perspective

Islamic movement of Tunis was established by Rashid Ghannouchi on the issue of Arabic identity and social reactions. Al-Nahda was called "*Al Jamah al Islamiyah*" then converted to MTI and then Al-Nahda party. The movement was trying to bring Islam to take part in the public sphere. One of the main causes of establishing the Islamic movement was that Bourguiba had tried to incorporate the concept of modern state and adopted French model as modern state. These occurrences were not only a plan to make Tunisia a secular state but it has a
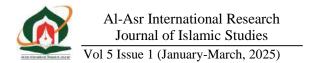
negative attitude towards religion. However, in the era of both Bourguiba and Bin Ali, Islamic movement was oppressed by the authorities and not allowed to participate in public sphere.

Later on, in 2011 a long suppression, corruption, illegitimate dictatorship of regimes, mismanagement, disputes and injustice led the country towards Arab awakening. During this sensitive period of Arab spring, Islamic movement of Tunisia did not make any mistake and played a vital role to bring people on the roads against cruel authorities which ruled Tunisia since its independence. After the fall of dictatorship and a harsh process of weak democracy, Al-Nahda, being an Islamic movement has also changed its strategy and became the party of Muslim democrats. Keeping in view that we have free society and do not have need to be holistic social and political body as mentioned earlier that first and foremost issue is secular understanding of religion. Secondly the radical understanding towards society and describing society a secular one and which needs to be brought back to Islam. Discussions were undergone inside Al-Nahda party at earlier, they we were trying to answer the question that what is the priority? For the movement at the moment. Is it politics or some things else? Most of party leadership was agreed to adopt Muslim democrats' philosophy.

So, as for other Islamic movements, they are successful in different parts of the world. For instance, in Turkeye, AK party having Islamic identity, was leading country very successfully. Iran is very strong Islamic state, although disagreements are there in their policies role especially in the Middle East. However, one thing Islamic movements need to have found the concept of Muslim societies where Islam can play key role and can express general consensus. Tunisian society preserved Islam during the period of secular regimes.

Large number of people was offering prayers in the mosques and ladies were wearing veil. These were practicing Muslims, who just need to be organized in public sphere for the restoration of Islam after dictatorship.

These are some lessons we need to learn as Islamic movement. We need to have experience and patience with working others to learn the art of government. Another important thing which Islamic movements have to understand that we need to reconcile with our societies because those societies are very decent Muslim societies. We need to bring more food, bread, wealth and justice, means economic prosperity as possible. We need to disseminate concept of participation for masses. We are not there to rule them, if we have the ideology to rule over them then there is no difference between the Islamic movements and corrupt regimes. Last point is being Islamic movements, we have to focus on politics rather than on different welfare and educational activities. This was all about the crux of the journey to Muslim democrats from political Islam.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Post Arab spring scenario, as prescribed in the context of political Islam, derived attention of political Islam specialists to the innovative approach of Rashid Al-Ghanushi, as an ideologue and co-founder of Al-Nahda movement of Tunisia. He spent dozens of exile years in London and felt appropriate climate to rejoin his homeland after the fall of Bin Ali dictatorship. He has long and sound terms with renowned leadership of Muslim world and Islamic movements. Arab spring commenced from Tunisia and consigned to rest of some MENA countries.

There was a majority in the very first post Arab spring general elections in Tunisia possessed to Al-Nahda in 2011. These elections were considered first free

elections of the history of Tunisia since 1956.[16] He was Rashid Al-Ghanushi who decided to form a collation government with Nida Tunas, who was, as an opponent to Al-Nahda, considered a secular party. It was a message of broad vision and innovation from Ghanushi. Later on, political situation in Tunisia took multiple dimensions. Role of Ghanushi and his party was a core one in Tunisian political scenario despite different results in general and local bodies elections.

Meanwhile, in May 2016, 10th congress of Al-Nahda party was conducted. This congress holds attention of political Islam specialists towards a paradigm shifting speech of party leader Ghanushi during this procession. He took his time to explain the political history of his country and situation in rest of the world. This particular Congress occurred in a challenging security, political and economic circumstances of both local and international levels. Tunisia was under scrutiny internationally and locally, thus the Islamic party Congress involved a very large number of foreign guests, among which were key leaders of other Islamic political parties of Muslim populated countries. Basic theme of the congress and a paradigm shift in Al-Nahda's communication strategy has turned towards the rebranding of the party as "Muslim Democrats". The strategy of the Party was clearly announced in the congress. The Al-Nahdah movement aims at renewing its party in order to increase its popularity, as a democratic political party, open and entrenched in Islamic references as defined in the 2014 Constitution of Tunisian republic. This rebranding does not suggest a change in philosophy but a change in perception and strategy, inside and outside the party. This new label is in fact the manifestation of a long process that was underway in the early days of the party. This specific moment of rebranding has been seen by

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[16] Arieff, Alexis, and C. Humud. "Political Transition in Tunisia." *Current Politics and Economics of Africa* 7, no. 4 (2014): 497-521.

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much of the media and other observers as a break or a profound transformation of the party's identity.

In fact, the Al-Nahda's preference towards reform and adaptation has been shaped by its experience of alternating sequences of power and oppression since its creation in the late 1980s. The party's leadership has developed a pragmatic approach to politics and become a reasonable player of the democratic game. Al-Nahda's approach towards Islamic revival is not, and practically never was, the expression of an anti-modern objection to the West or to non-Muslims. In the existing context, which allows the terrifying, simplistic and quasi-exclusive association of the terms "Islamism" and "terrorism" and political Islam? The party leader and ideologue Al-Ghanushi decided to finally drop its "Political Islamist self" to become "Muslim democrat". The paradigm shift in the traditional stance of the party is a pragmatic move. Is it a rubber stamp of the transition from oppositional repressed party to a leading democratic actor with the prospect of future victory?[17]

This question was answered by Mr. Ghanushi himself in his speech during the congress and after the event in his lectures and writings. Recent local bodies' elections in Tunisia resulted again a reasonable victory for Al-Nahda. It is worthwhile to observe that renowned scholars of political Islam round the globe appreciated this move of Al-Ghanushi and consider it a milestone for rest of the Islamic movements.

This study was conducted to explore about the basics of Political Islam and Muslim democrats and future global perspectives. So, after the study we are going to conclude that political Islam and Muslim democrats have same principles

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[17] Lemière, Sophie. *"Islamist echoes in the context of the Tunisian Islamist Party's 10th congress."* Europian University Institute working papers, Badia Fiesolana, Italy. (2017). p.1
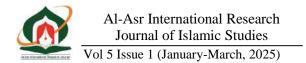
and goals of Islamic revolution, although their strategies are quite different in respect of their countries. After 9/11 attacks, Political Islam have been labeled as radical, violent and terrorist movements and Al-Qaida is classified within the category of Political Islamists. In these circumstances, few Islamic movements had taken historic transition towards democracy.

Furthermore, the term political Islam was coined by the western think tanks and media. The term political Islam seeks dominance in the second half of 20th century, meanwhile the term Muslim democrats has new and started in 21st century. Arab awakening has toppled military regimes in Middle East, especially in Egypt, Tunis, Yemen, Syria and Morocco. In first free and fair elections after the Arab spring, Islamic movements obtained victory in respective countries, however only Ennahda was survived in Tunis while other movements have oppressed by their military. Unfortunately, the current situation in Tunisia is not different from other spring countries. Arab spring transformed into Arab autumn again. So, this study focused how Al-Nahda survived in Tunis and which type of initiatives they took to prevail democracy in country after more than half century worst dictatorship as compare to other MENA countries. The study concludes that Al-Nahda's initiative towards democracy was need of the time. After revolution main priority was to build political system and to establish the society for the process of democratization. There was a dire need to create consensus among secular, nationalist and Islamic political parties. Political and ideological polarization among radical, secular and Islamists was on peak, so Al-Nahda's political project was based on consensus between moderate Islamists and secularists. Radical secularists were not happy with democratic process and tried to jeopardize new political system by different ways and tools. Moreover, foreign
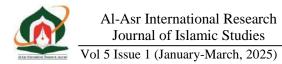
and regional interventions by spending money and using media to jeopardize democratic political process and create internal difficulties and crises in country were key issues. In these circumstances Al-Nahda, being the ruling and influential party of the country forced continues negotiations among political elites and made compromises for the sake of democracy. During national dialogue regarding constitution, Al-Nahda compromises on issues such as sharia source of legislation, freedom of belief and equality among men and women which do not contradicts to sharia.

Similarly, it is the need of the hour to analyze the circumstances and on ground realities of each and every movement's structure of state and society. When we were finalizing the study, a massive student's movement ousted Bangladesh prime minister and formed a government of technocrats. Media reports are showing an active role of *Jamaat-Islami* and its students wing behind this revolution. Islamic movements are sustaining their existence and active role in their respective societies and facing huge challenges. Conscious Muslim Polity (CMP), a strategic politics is the way forward.

Future research can be conducted by taking any specific case study like Ikhwan-ul- Muslimoon, Al Al-Nahda, Jamaat-e-Islami etc. there is a need of a detailed case study analysis regarding these specificities. Future research can also be directed in policy-oriented dimension. Although in current thesis, some of the policy related things are discussed yet comprehensiveness in terms of policy making and drafting can be studied in future. Moreover, in context of China, it is very imperative to discuss political Islam as China has a profound impact worldwide and in case of Pakistan, China has special attention and concerns. So Political Islam from Chinese context may add value for future research. It is
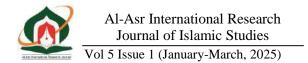
required to see the condition of Muslims in China from Political Islam perspective. Then in future, study can be conducted in context of those countries where Muslims are not in much number yet their influence over there is of high importance. Recently, there was an incident of killing innocent Muslims in New Zealand which has shaken the world with grief. Now, it seems difficult for the Muslims in such countries to present themselves in perspective of Political Islam. In current research, we have presented a model of Conscious Muslim Polity but in future, further models need to be developed. Especially when we talk about politics in local context then it may have different facets as compared to international politics. So, in future further models in this regard can be developed.

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