

The Future of the Arab Spring: Civic Entrepreneurship in Politics, Art, and Technology Startups by Maryam Jamshidi, UK: Butterworth-Heinemann, 2014

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The term ‘Arab Spring’ is a controversial term and is used to describe the recent events in the Arab world beginning from the event which took place in Tunisia on December 17, 2010 and was followed by various mobilizations in MENA region in the name of so-called revolution. However, since the start of the Arab Spring the scholars and the academicians are engaged to debate the issue in their works, discussions and talks as a result a profuse literature came into existence dealing with the subject. Among such scholars comes the name of Maryam Jamshidi who is a lawyer and writer with nearly ten years of experience working on the issues relating to the Middle East and North America (MENA). She is the founder of muftah.org, a digital magazine focusing on domestic and international issues affecting countries in the MENA region. She has written this book entitled, “*The Future of the Arab Spring: Civic Entrepreneurship in Politics, Art, and Technology Startups*” on the basis of first hand interviews and also secondary sources. This book is a beautiful addition to such literature which not only provides a short history of the Arab world and the Arab Spring but also intends to ignite conversations about the meaning, import and practical significance of civic entrepreneurship during the Arab Spring by proliferating some of the region’s most inspiring groups, organizations, movements and technological startups. (p.3) The author has divided the whole work into seven chapters which includes ‘Introduction’ and ‘Conclusion’. While discussing the civic entrepreneurship, the author has divided it into three sections viz. ‘Civic Entrepreneurship in Politics and Society’ (pp.45-76); ‘Civic Entrepreneurship in Art and Culture’ (pp.77-100) and ‘Civic Entrepreneurship in Technology Startups’ (pp.101-114) and are enclosed under chapter 4, chapter 5 and chapter 6 respectively.

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In the introductory chapter of the book titled ‘Introduction’ (pp.1-4), the author has beautifully initiates with the aims, objectives, methodology and framework of the book. The author tries to bring forth the revolutions caused by the Arab Spring including innovative approaches to political mobilization and popular resistances which took the ruling regimes by surprise. The author holds that she has chosen the organizations from the six countries viz. Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Bahrain, and Syria, ‘to encourage further study and examination of the growing trend in civic entrepreneurship throughout the Arab World’. (p.3) The chapter one is followed by ‘A Short History of Arab World and the Arab Spring’ (pp.5-22) which forms the chapter second of the book. This chapter, as the author rightly maintains, provides a short history on the region and the events erupted for the revolution in the above mentioned six countries. The author has framed the chapter under one heading, “The Arab Spring Erupts” (pp.8-22) followed by seven sub-headings. The first six subheadings are titled on the names of the countries in focus and the seventh subheading reads “Euphoria Turns Sour” (pp.16-22). The chapter discusses, briefly but in a comprehensive manner, the beginning of the Arab Spring in Tunisia and how it passed to other regions of Arab and later how this euphoria turns into despair.

The third chapter titled “Revolution, Ideology, and Democracy”, (pp.23-43) as maintained by the author, ‘explores how the Arab Spring has redefined prevailing notions of revolution, ideology and democracy and how this relates to the rise of civic entrepreneurship in the region’. (p.4) The author discusses the emergence of three trends—“Revolution”, “Ideology” and “Democracy” and examines why these trends fail to accurately capture the Arab Spring. (p.23) It also demonstrates, maintains the author, how civic entrepreneurship challenges these approaches and formulates the concepts of revolution, ideology and democracy in ways that better reflect the nature of the region’s uprisings. (p.23)

Chapter Four “Civic Entrepreneurship in Politics and Society”, explores some of the countless, groups, movements, organizations, initiatives working on political and social issues in many Arab Spring countries. It examines the rise of issue-based movements and citizen-organized local councils under the seven sub-headings: Public Squares (pp.46-50); Local Citizen Councils (pp.50-53); Political and Social Movements (pp.53-61); Strengthening Civil Society, Supporting the Youth (pp.61:64); Women’s Issues (pp.64-68); Volunteerism (pp.68-74); and, Internet Activism (pp.74-76).

Chapter Five, “Civic Entrepreneurship in Art and Culture” profiles a small selection of the many artistic and cultural initiatives and forms of creative civic entrepreneurship that have emerged since the start of Arab Spring. The author outlines various innovative enterprises

used by the common masses to express and demonstrate anger and voice against their regime, through their hitherto hidden traditional art and culture under the following four subheadings: Creative Resistance (pp.78-82); Street Graffiti (pp.82-85); Video and Film (pp.85-90); and, Music and Dance (pp.90-100). For the author believes that ‘the Arab Spring has not only been a political, social and economic revolution; it has also been a cultural and artistic one’. (p.77)

In the sixth chapter, “Civic Entrepreneurship in Technology Startups”, which forms the third section of the book, the author reflects the Arab Spring’s spirit of collaboration under the following six startups: Saphon Energy(pp.103-106); 18 Days in Egypt (pp. 106-108); Wadeeny (pp. 108-109); Souriali (pp.109-111); Syria Untold (pp.112-113) and Qabila Media Productions (pp.113-114). Thus, author tries to explore how entrepreneurship is connected with the business world and how the entrepreneurs work for themselves and create their own business.

In the Seventh and last Chapter, “Conclusion: Will Spring Be Eternal?” (pp.115-116), the author poses question about the fate of Arab spring. Giving importance to the civic entrepreneurship, the author concludes that the absence of civic entrepreneurship would end the region’s revolutions and send individuals back into the private sphere with placing the fate of these countries in the hands of a privileged few.

The book is very interesting and significant in which the author has logically discussed the events related to the future of Arab Spring with special reference to the civic entrepreneurship and has indeed opened new vistas to contemplate on other initiatives of the Arab Spring. The book is a great academic contribution from the author and the subject discussed is equally beneficial for students as well as scholars of Social Sciences in general and particularly those who are working on the Arab Spring and MENA region.
