

Shaking Monarchy and Shouting Masses: Arab Spring and Bahrain Uprising 2011

Abstract

The archipelagic Middle Eastern state of Bahrain popularly known as ‘an island of golden smiles’, witnessed worst social disorder during 2011. The magnitude of the pandemonium which hit the state coincided with enormity of Arab Spring chaos in the region and was relatively a new phenomenon for the sovereigns and subjects both. Historically, state of Bahrain had smooth transition from ‘pearling to petroleum’ and from ‘poverty to prosperity’ without any social disarray. Population of the state is heterogeneous mix of Shia and Sunni Muslims with former in clear majority yet latter dominating in all aspects of socioeconomic life. The approaching turmoil of 2011 flustered monarchy adopting few extraordinary measures never employed in the Gulf States in modern history. The outcry of population was deafening as record number of protestors took to the Pearl Square for demanding their social and political rights. This God sent opportunity was seized by trailblazer politicians who swayed the conflict towards ethno-religious sphere, mandating deep social inquiry for determining exogenous and endogenous causes. This article argues that conflict in Bahrain is contextually arraignment of socioeconomic and sociopolitical deprivations than having ethno-religious pegging, with sect as chief motivator for inter sect confrontation.

Keywords: Arab Spring, Sectarianism, Gerrymandering, Bassiouni Report

Introduction

Conflicts in Middle East are not new phenomenon. An enduring Arab-Israel conflict, hosting of wars like Iraq (1991 & 2003) and Iran-Iraq conflict (1980-1988) are few major conflicts witnessed by region in modern history. The domino effect of state-public conflict in Tunisia in December 2010 engulfed many Middle Eastern countries including few gulf sheikhdoms. National commemorations on 14th February 2011 at Pearl Square in Manama (Bahrain) – for celebrating formulation of National Action Charter of 2001 and 1st Constitution of the state took an ugly turn and transformed into mass protest against monarchy. Turmoil being widespread was perceived as ‘freshening draught of Arab Spring’ⁱⁱ by optimists, ‘Arab revolt’ by vigilantes and ‘Arab winter’ by pessimists. Mass protests in monarchic Gulf States are indescribable events as such happenings are perceived as existential threat for monarchies. Therefore states’ response has always been very brutal for crushing uprisingsⁱⁱⁱ. Over the years, psychological and epistemological rupture has occurred in Middle East which has shaken authoritarian order to its very foundation (Garges, 2014). Most of the Gulf States

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are rich through oil rents however Bahrain is economically weak (0.03% of proven GCC oil reserves which will dry up in next 10-12 years) in comparison to other Gulf States. Periodic outbreaks of social unrest in Bahrain have alternated with periods of détente in cycles dating back to early 20th century. In the context of recent uprising, Syrian intellectual Burhan Ghalyoun eloquently argued that Arab world has witnessed ‘an awakening of the people who have been crushed by despotic regimes’ (Lynch, 2011) for decades. Political awaking of masses in Bahrain in 2011 was a link of the chain reaction which started from Tunisia and continues even today in the state of Bahrain.

Middle East has population of 370 million excluding Cypress (5.4% of the overall world population) and houses 16 independent countries (World Bank 2014). It is birth place of three major religions of the world; Christianity, Judaism and Islam. Majority of the population is Muslim (Over 85%) however inter-sect abrasions have only been witnessed in Islam; Shia and Sunni sects. Exact data of sectarian subdivision (Shia & Sunni) in the Gulf States is not available as census has not been undertaken since long especially on sectarian lines.

Middle East has two major regional players; Saudi Arabia and Iran, their competition in economic and sect based religious realms dominates regional politics. States in Middle East having majority of Shia Muslims (Iraq, Iran & Syria) are politically supported by Iran for championing Shia cause whereas states having Sunni majority are patronized by Saudi Arabia thus ‘Middle East Cold War’ is continuing since long. State of Bahrain has majority of Shia population (70% approx)^{iv} being ruled by Sunni monarchy thus sect based religious division distinctly exists. On strategic level island is very important being as ‘arena for proxy war’ between Iran and Saudi Arabia both. In fact Bahrain provided and arena of proxy competition for Tehran and Riyadh that possesses key strategic value for both (Mabon, 2012). This article argues that recent awakening of masses in the tiny state of Bahrain was not because of sectarian fracture as professed in western literature but is more for securing political, economic and social rights for both sects (Shia & Sunni) who feel politically, socially and economically oppressed under existing monarchic arrangement. However the sectarian challenge faced by the island nation today will result in social disintegration if not managed by the ruling monarch in near future.

Existing Literature

Conflicts are complicated and dynamic social phenomena - generally attributed to economic, political, social and religious discrimination amongst communities. Gurr (1970) and Ellingsen (1997) posited that outbreak of conflicts is based on combination of factors; frustration (repression and sufferings), opportunity (freedom to organize, access to weapons, finances and availability of rebels) and common identity (cohesion facilitates mobilization). Stern (2003) hypothesized that religions are absolute whereas on the contrary Oberschall (2000) posited that ethnicity is absolute and permanent. While extending discourse further, Stewart (2002) argues that unequal access to political, economic and social resources coinciding with cultural differences (religion being part of a culture) creates conflicts. Reynal-Querol asserts that religious polarization and religious dominance by one group increases likelihood of religion based conflicts (Reynal-

Querol, 2002; Montalo & Reunal-Querol, 2005). Furthermore, risk of internal conflict increases when religious differences are reinforced by other differences like ethnicity, socioeconomic status or even sect (Stewart, 2008, Selway, 2011). Religious conflicts are metaphysical battles between forces of good and evil which enlivens the religious imagination and compels violent action (Treverton, Gregg, Gibran, & Charles, 2005). This assertion is applicable to sectarian conflicts as well. Conflict between Shia and Sunnis in Bahrain does not stem from differences over religious doctrine and practices but is entrenched in historical and contemporary competition for state power as 'Sunni-Shia identities are more ethnic than religious' (Smock, 2008). Both major players of Middle East (Saudi Arabia and Iran) hardly follow policies having religious precepts as dominant but are more inclined to exert political influence in overall power calculus of the region and 'desire to preserve quasi theocratic status quo'. However religious identities are never synonymous to ethnic identity as the former implies to religious beliefs and activities whereas latter has relation with group formation. Religion plays an important role in many intrastate conflicts however religion is not usually the sole or primary cause of conflict (Smock, 2008). Other causal factors of conflicts like political, economic and social grievances are intertwined with religion however avenues to ameliorate these conflicts for peaceful resolution 'lies within religious realms' as all religions oppose repression and profess peace and harmony.

Contextual Appraisal of Conflict

Bahraini society is complex and stratified. Sustained campaigns for social and economic rights have occurred at regular intervals in 1921-1923, 1934-35, 1938, 1947-48, 1953-56, 1965 and 1975, with 1950 being notable for creation of a nonsectarian social movement (Ulrichsen, 2014). Bahrain's internal dissension and dissonance has direct link with discovery of oil in the state in 1932. The oil-find created many job opportunities and British preferred employing foreign workers because of having better education and technical skills. The local population started protests for fulfilling demand of greater share in jobs. The important aspect of these remonstrations was participation by both Shia and Sunnis beyond their religious identities.

The subsequent decade of 1950s witnessed volatile political situation in Bahrain. The major demands of the protestors through cyclic agitations and strikes remained ingrained in fulfilment of social, economic and political rights for both sects. Few commentators held sharp sectarian divide and inter-sect rivalry responsible for protracted turmoil of 50s however details of religious identity of demonstrators are not available which makes the argument tautological. Until late 70s both monarch and opposition avoided issue of sectarian inequality generated by state formation process (Wimmen, 2014) and sectarian divide issue remained latent. A constituent assembly was elected in 1972 which paved way towards adoption of state's new constitution (Cottrel, 1980) however the Monarch bag-packed the constituent assembly in 1975 which back rolled the nascent democracy as well. However stalled political reforms by monarch brought Shia and Sunni population even closer (Fakhro, 1997).

The unfolding of unusual events of 1979 in Iran had lasting impact on Bahrain's political and social life because of having large Shia population. Taking lead from the contemporary episode of Iranian revolution, Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain (IFLB)^v made an attempt to overthrow Bahraini Monarchy. The failed coup d'état is perceived to be politically motivated and financed by Iranian government through IFLB however this claim has never been substantiated with any convincing proof. The decade of 80s followed sinusoidal pattern with anti-state protests participated by both sectarian groups. In the process, few new religious organizations cropped up and started pursuing their objectives through violent means. A London based Bahrain Freedom Movement^{vi} (BFM) gained prominence during this decade. The most interesting aspect of the BFM campaign was participation of both sects having shared grievances and demanded political and economic reforms (Bahrain Independent Commission for Inquiry Report, 2011).

The decade of 1990s, witnessed no major change in social and political system thus low intensity unrest kept simmering. In 1994, a petition bearing signatures of many thousands including both Shia and Sunni population was filed with monarch. The petitioners' complaints were wide ranging; authoritarianism, stagnant economy, absence of basic civil and political rights, corruption and favouritism within ruling family and repressive and largely foreign staffed security apparatus (Al Mdaires, 2002). The deprivations based unrest resulted in loss of over 40 lives in Bahrain as concluded by Inquiry Commission Report while tracing the causes of unrest. However the movement was distinguished by its non-sectarian character (Hanieh, 2013)

The decade 2000s brought hope and optimism for resolution of the protracted social conflict when the present monarch, Sheikh Hammad bin Issa al Khalifa, acceded to the crown on 6 March 1999. Announcement of social reform agenda - scaling back foreign labour for creating space for locals in job market was warmly welcomed by all. As an assuaging gesture, he freed over 500 political prisoners languishing in different jails since last many years and espoused new constitution through referendum on February 14, 2001. The elections of 2002 put the state on democratic trajectory. Municipal elections of 2006 and 2010 further strengthened belief of population in the evolving system and conflict navigated downward trajectory. However it is a fact that during decade of 2000s, opposition against Bahraini regime was dominated by political forces with pronounced Shia background, the issue was primarily political participation and social injustice, not the sect (Wimmen, 2014).

Bahrain Uprising vis-à-vis Arab Spring

On February 14, 2011^{vii} in Bahrain, people from almost all walks of life gathered at Pearl Square Manama, for commemoration of formulation of National Action Charter of 2001 and 1st Constitution of the state. The gathering had festive mood and was being attended by all sectarian groups without any disparity and distinction. However, festivity took an ugly turn and transformed into a mass protest wrecking latency of the old conflict thus evaporating decade's long conflict management endeavours into thin air. The major demands of the emboldened protestors was; altering the constitution to expand power of Council of

Representatives (COR)^{viii}, ending gerrymandering of election districts, providing more jobs, economic opportunities and replacing of hardliner prime minister (Katzman, 2015). The protests soon swelled and spread to 55 neighbourhoods of the state. Police used force injuring 14 innocent people and loss of one life on 1st day of protest at Manama. On February 23, 2011, after lot of gripe and grumble, quarter of the population of Bahrain (one in three out of all Bahraini citizens) joined protestors at Pearl Square^{ix} making it one of the largest protests in the Middle East ever taken place. One month of protests resulted in death of seven protestors and resignation of 18 Shia members from the parliament (Al-Shehabi, 2011). The demonstrations assumed popular overtones as Sunnis and Shia alike gathered in unprecedented number chanting slogans 'No Shia, No Sunnis only Bahrainis (Ulrichsen, 2014). The expanding nature of the protest jolted monarchic foundations thus military help was sought from GCC countries for quelling uprising. Saudi Arabia and UAE provided 1000 and 500 troops (Peninsula Shield Force) each and these forces landed in Bahrain on March 14, 2011. Uprising was crushed by applying brute force by state and foreign troops in the middle of night (Ulrichsen, 2011) and symbolic unity statue of Pearl carrying pent-pod was removed from the square to avoid becoming another Tehrir Square^x.

King of Bahrain ordered a fact finding inquiry on June 29, 2011. The inquiry commission^{xi} was headed by Cherif Bassiouni^{xii}, international judges, local lawyers and few academicians. Majority of the population was very optimistic about the initiative and thought that a permanent end to the conflict would be possible by implementing recommendations of the commission. In parallel, negotiations also got underway between; government, opposition political societies (parties), NGOs under the semblance of 'National Dialogue'. The main opposition party (Al-Wafaq, a Shia party) backed out of negotiation process after 10 days of commencement, complaining non serious attitude of the government in meeting its demands. The inquiry commission presented its report on November 23, 2011. The report mentioned that uprising was not limited to Shia population but Sunnis and expatriates have also been the target of human right violations. (Bahrain Independent Commission for Inquiry Report, 2011). The contents of the report strengthen the argument of participatory role of both sects in the uprising.

Sectarian Transformation of Uprising

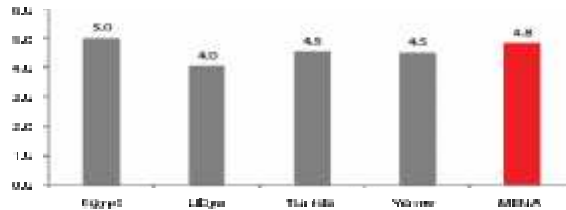
The 'Day of Rage'^{xiii} call, spread through social media, had explicit support of handful Sunni and few proscribed Shia societies like Al Haq, Al Wafa and BFM. The support was further strengthened when it congregated endorsement of Shia clergy and politicians of biggest opposition Party – Al Wafaq through Friday sermons and activists' meetings. The support of nonsectarian secular leftist group Al Waad was an additional factor in mobilization. However the extraordinary event of intervention by GCC forces accentuated sectarian dimension of protest. Gradually all citizens were forced to take a stand by supporting or opposing the uprising based on religious affiliations. (Karolak, 2012). International support or condemnation mustered by Shia politicians of the state transformed the uprising into sectarian realm. Shia population living in gulf countries started condemning Bahraini regime whereas Sunni governments of the Middle Eastern countries supported the ruling dynasty of Bahrain. Condemnation by Iran was most vocal

especially after military intervention by Peninsula Shield Forces which resulted into severing of bilateral diplomatic ties. Demonstrations in support of the Bahraini opposition were staged by Shia populations in Iran, Lebanon, and Iraq as well as in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. Severe criticism by Iraq and Hizbullah further swayed the uprising towards sectarian bias.

Analysis

The resurged ‘government versus people’ conflict in Bahrain is perceived as an ethno-religious conflict by western media and scholarship. However, reality is in contrast to this general discernment. Political analysts have consensus about cocktail of various contributing factors which created ‘social explosion’ in the form of 2011 Arab uprisings especially in Bahrain. The deadly potion of factors; economic deterioration, prevalent corruption, lack of civil liberties, political suppression, repressive and violent nature of the Arab regimes are few causes to cite. Causes are more entrenched in social and political deprivations with economic inequality as chief cause rather than sectarianism which are discussed in ensuing paragraphs.

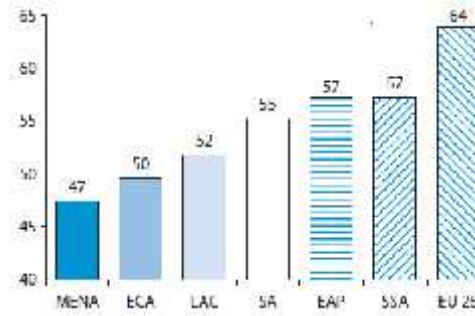
Before springing up of Arab Spring phenomenon, Middle East and North Africa (MENA) was enjoying higher economic growth rate as compared to other regions of the world. From 2000-2010, region experienced strongest per capita growth since oil crisis in 1970 (International Monetary Fund, 2010). Influx of petro dollars through oil rents had largely contributed towards development of social infrastructure and positively impacted on regional development indicators (World Bank, 2009). Graph shows average real GDP growth rate (2000-2010) of few Middle East countries.



Source: IMF World Economic Outlook, April 2011

Availability of money helped in infrastructural development and substantial improvement in Human Development Indicators (HDI) of MENA region. Overall HDIs of the 17 Arab countries including Gulf States rose from 0.425 to 0.630 during 1980 to 2010. Sharp rise in HDIs impacted positively on gulf societies and resulted in improvement of education (1.2%), life expectancy (0.7%) and infant mortality rate (-3.8%) (Kuhn, 2011). Despite conspicuous economic progress, socio-economic challenges of unemployment, skewed wealth distribution and higher birth rates continued to haunt governments and monarchies both as improvement in healthcare facilities and higher birth rates have created youth bulge in region particularly in Gulf States. Improved education levels amongst females further complemented the problem encroaching job market thus augmenting unemployment further especially in Bahrain which hovered around

15% to 30% (Wright, 2008). Employment data of different regions of the world compiled by World Bank as shown in the graph amply manifests the same.



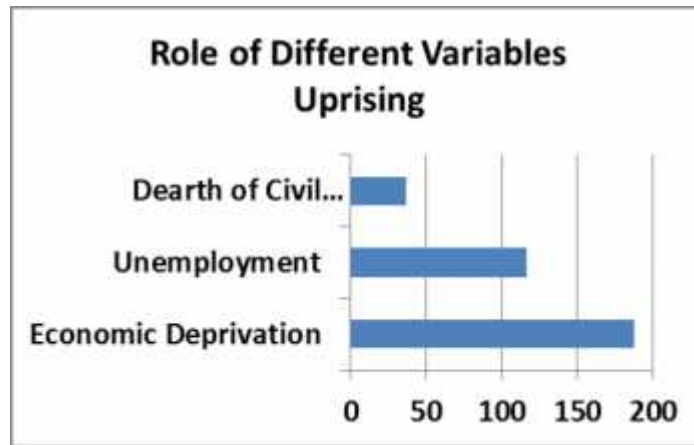
Source: World Bank, 2009. [MENA (Middle East and North Africa), ECA (Europe and Central Asia), LAC (Latin America and Caribbean), EAP (East Asia and Pacific), SA (South Asia), SSA (Sub Sahara Africa EU (European Union))]

Since decade of 1980s, Arab economies have faced great pressure from IMF and World Bank to reform and liberalize. The structural adjustment programs resulted in evaporation of royal subsidies on daily life commodities and reduction of government jobs for populations. This culminated in reduced earnings and impoverishment of masses, sky rocketing food basket prices and higher unemployment. The frontal embrace of economic liberalism in Bahrain accentuated unevenness of economic development and ruling elites got richer and richer by using unfair business practices amassing enormous amount of wealth thus widening the gap of 'haves and have not'^{xiv}. Economic crisis of 2008-2009 added fuel to the simmering fire and adversely affected by trimming down the economic growth of most of the gulf countries. Over the years, the unemployed educated youth had become politically more aware of their social rights and started demanding respite from their respective governments. This has given rise to a new Arab political identity having anti-despotic, pluralist and democracy-seeking approach. Oil rent economies have inherent flaw of structural unresponsiveness with limited creation of jobs which generates social grievances in the longer run and has been the case in gulf state especially in Bahrain. Additionally regimes have by and large remained disconnected from the social needs of their subjects and have been ruling with iron fist approach. Apart from abovementioned inadequacies 'political freedom deficit' and rampant corruption in the Gulf States are additional causes for emergence of uproars. There are three types of regimes functioning in the region; praetorian republics, monarchies and ethno-religious democracies (Henry & Springborg, 2010). Most of these regimes with the exception of very few are highly authoritarian where political power is monopolized by few rather than many. Public protest for accountability of regimes in Gulf States has been on the rise especially in praetorian states like Egypt, Syria and Tunisia however monarchies have not let that happen thus suffocating masses. World Bank report on governance indicators about Bahrain manifests the same as Voice and Accountability Index comparison of 1998-2010 shows negligible change (World Bank, 2011). A survey undertaken by YouGov-Cambridge of 16

Arab countries showed that most important problem being faced by populations was prevalent official and royal corruption (Yougov-Cambridge, August 2011).

The causes of Bahraini uprising were investigated by authors utilizing interviewing as research tool. A total of 311 people living in various cities and small rural towns including many who actually took part in 2012 protests were interviewed. The questions encompassed; economic deterioration and unemployment, corruption, lack of civil liberties, access to various administrative and legal services along with their performance, availability of state sponsored housing and amenities, foreigner's naturalization, political suppression and liking or disliking of present monarchic regime.

Out of 311 interviewees, overwhelming majority 224 (72%) refuted the idea of involvement of sect as a key player in emergence of uprising. Economic deprivations, unemployment and dearth of civil liberties stood out as major triggers of uprising. Dearth



Further probing into sectarian divide issue revealed that sectarian card has been played by few pro-Iranian politicians in Bahrain in the broader perspective on Middle Eastern politics where sect has been heartlessly exploited; Egypt, Syria and Lebanon are few examples of the this claim. Succinct majority of 180 (58%) interviewees belonging to both sects claimed that state monarchy was the part of problem rather than being part of solution. The discord lies more between the royal family and the Shia faction rather between Sunnis and Shia where monarchy has marginalized Shia population and prevented them from working in to certain sectors (Sotloff, 2010). The establishment of inquiry commission was a plausible step taken by the monarch however selective implementation of the commission's recommendations deflated the aura of delight. Selective implementation of few recommendations which favoured government generated back lash of masses.

Political division in Bahrain has caused serious polarization in society hindering any reconciliatory steps taken by the government for resolution of the conflict. This parochial and insular political approach has brought situation to a dead end. However over the years, the conflict character has changed. Commonly perceived ethno-religious conflict has transformed into a social conflict. Gulf societies have started looking forward to quality life and fulfilment of personal

aspirations. This yearning has pushed the population beyond religious, ethnic or sectarian realm. People of Bahrain are less concerned about sectarian identity but look forward to better economic and social future for their next generations. During uprising, sea of national flags and solemn commitments of Shia and Sunni further underlines the national, rather factional character of the protests. The encampment site (Pearl Square) was nonsectarian space as protestors based themselves at a place which was not associated with any sect. If it was only Shia uprising then site would have been selected in Shia neighbourhood.

The main objective of protests was not to end Sunni rule but was focused on transforming the state to a constitutional monarchy (Friedman, 2012) and this demand was in line with Egyptian and Tunisian development. Since the first demonstration in mid-February, both Sunni and Shia participated in mobilizations and endured subsequent government repression (Hanieh, 2013). Many Sunnis reject the notion of systematic prejudice and believe it to be exaggerated. Sunnis have political power but Shias have economic power in the commercial sectors. Ministry of health is essentially Shia enclave where Sunnis have restricted access. Field survey of hospitals ownership in the capita Manama shows that over 74%^{xv} of private hospitals are owned by Shia population where health services are rendered without any sectarian prejudice.

Based on the above analysis three possible scenarios emerge; (1) reforms are implemented, (2) repression continues and (3) revolution takes place. In case of complete implementation of recommendations (reforms) put forth by Bassiouni Inquiry Commission and meaningful dialogue, state will become politically stable and order will restore which will be win-win situation for both sectarian groups. If the existing scheme of governance continues with no appreciable change, the mayhem and chaos will draw out volatility affecting overall regional instability. Prolong delay and inaction in case of implementation of reforms may result in violent revolution which may change the overall power calculus of the region. In this case Saudi Arabia will be the most affected country because of having large Shia population living in its eastern region where state's major oil wealth is housed.

Conclusion

Bahrain is a land of promise and protests. Its problems go much beyond the sectarian divide and discrimination and include protracted political conflict between government and opposition. Dwindling economy, mounting unemployment, high rate of poverty (in comparison to other gulf states) and drying oil wells are few contributors to this precarious situation. Shia Sunni divide is a hard reality of Bahraini life. The economic disparity and inequality amongst both sects needs to be alleviated through major policy interventions by the state as early as possible. State will continue facing such challenges in future till the root cause (economic disproportion) is not addressed. Monarch's political powers need rationalization as per true democratic norms as Bahrain has taken lead in overall democratization process of Middle East. Holding of Inquiry for finding causes of the uprising was a step in right direction however selective implementation of recommendations proved fissiparous for the society. This requires immediate

remedial measures to avoid future challenges which have been contained but not resolved. Un-pragmatic methods for conflict management have further radicalized opposition and even undermined the support of Sunni constituency for the monarch as well. This does not auger well for reconciliation and recovery in the longer run.

The government may be content that majority of the population still operates beyond ethnic and sectarian affiliations as shown by survey findings however table can quickly turn because religious identities dominate all other identities in Muslim world. Social integration strategies need to be evolved for converting society into a consolidated single whole. The 'Dam-Making' approach may temporarily reduce possibilities of repetition of such sordid episodes however permanent solution is need of the hour. Revolutionary movements for political and economic emancipation have started challenging the conventional ways of governance, resilience and durability of monarchies. Though it is still not easy to dislodge monarchic regimes through agitation however winds of change have started blowing. The Gulf monarchs have to adopt the change quickly without waiting for the change to change these monarchies forever.

Endnotes

ⁱ Authors being academicians are extremely thankful to the reviewers of this article for providing valuable input and pointing new dimensions which were unintentionally missed out. All opinions are of the authors and do not necessarily present views of the printing journal. **Email:** [ihسانqadir1964@gmail.com](mailto:ihсанqadir1964@gmail.com) & drsaimalik@gmail.com

ⁱⁱ 'Arab Spring' being a political unrest and social disorder started from Tunisia in December 2010 and engulfed many regional countries. States which were directly affected by the chaos and commotion include; Tunisia, Algeria, Libya, Egypt, Yemen, Lebanon, Palestine, Jordan, Bahrain, Morocco, Iraq, Syria and Saudi Arabia. The major demand of the protestors was related to political reforms and change of regime types.

ⁱⁱⁱ The terms uprising, revolt, rebellion, upheaval, mutiny, revolution and insurgency all have specific definitions in conflict literature however uprising and awakening have been interchangeably used in this paper.

^{iv} Government officials vehemently dispute the population figure of 70% for Shia community however it is used in most of the academic work on Bahrain. The Shia community in Bahrain consists of the more numerous 'Baharna' who are of Arab ethnicity and descended from Arab tribes and inhabited the area from pre-Islamic times. Shia of Persian ethnicity, referred to as Ajam, arrived in Bahrain over the past 400 years and is much lesser than Baharna. The Ajam speak Persian and generally do not integrate with the Baharna or with Sunni Arabs.

^vThe Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain was a Shia militant group which pursued theocratic rule on the lines of Iran in Bahrain in the decade of 1980s. It was based in Iran and trained and financed by Iranian intelligence and Revolutionary Guards. The professed aim of the Front was the 'uprising of all Muslims under Imam Khomeini'.

^{vi}Bahrain Freedom Movement is a London based Bahrain opposition group which has its Headquarters in a north London. The BFM played a leading role in the 1990s uprising in Bahrain.

^{vii} The date was carefully selected by protestors as large number of population was expected to participate in commemorations regardless of sectarian identity. It was symbolic in a sense as it marked 10th anniversary of approval of National Action Charter and referendum in 2001. It was named as 'Day of Rage' by the protestors and was planned to coincide with outbreak of protests in Iran in continuation with wave of Arab Spring in the region.

^{viii} Council of Representatives is equivalent to Upper House (national assembly) having members from both sects.

^{ix} Pearl Square or Roundabout is a junction of major city arteries in business district of capital and is named after a statue depicting Bahrain's pearl-diving past.

^x Tehrir Square is the famous square in Cairo from where uprising started in Egypt resulting in demise of Hossani Mubarak regime.

^{xi} Complete report of the inquiry commission can be viewed at <http://files.bici.org.bh/BIClreportEN.pdf>.

^{xii} Cherif Bassiouni, was an Egyptian professor who investigated war crimes in Yugoslavia in 1990s on behalf of UN.

^{xiii} The organizers of the nationwide protest in Bahrain named it "**Day of Rage**" (February 14, 2011), held a strong belief that a "domino effect" would occur in the Middle East which eventually will bring changes in Bahraini political structure. However, upheavals in Bahrain are not novelty. As a matter of fact, since the country's independence, Bahrain had sporadic waves of unrest as Bahraini opposition became more vocal in their quest for rights in the 2000's. Nonetheless, the Bahraini "Day of Rage" was inspired by the protest strategies applied in other Arab countries.

^{xiv} In 2004, Bahrain Centre for Human Rights estimated that more than half of the Bahraini citizens were living in poverty whereas 5200 rich Bahrainis had combined wealth of \$ 20 Billion.

^{xv} This was concluded during field research for this article in 2014.

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