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Islam, Gender and Democracy in Comparative Perspective

Edited by: Jocelyne Cesari and Jose Casanova.

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In this day and age, there is barely any topic in the field of political science or religious studies, more interesting than the subject of the relationship between Islam and democracy: Is Islam compatible with democracy and democratic ideals, and women's rights in Islam? It becomes an even more attractive question considering the fact that the overwhelming majority of Muslim-populated countries (with only a few exceptions) are governed by either non-democratic regimes, or flimsy democracies, where rights of women is more or less unbranded.

The book "Islam, Gender and Democracy in comparative perspective" is edited volume by two eminent scholars *Jocelyne Cesari* (is Professor of Religion and Politics at the University of Birmingham and Senior Research fellow at Georgetown University's Berkley Center where she directs the Islam in World Politics Program.) and *Jose Casanova* (is Professor at the Department of Sociology at Georgetown University, and heads the Berkley Center's Program on Globalization, Religion, and the Secular.) valuable contribution trying to answer the above mentioned quires and it critically re-engages the concepts like Islam, gender and democracy with simple binary opposition by refraining the debate around Islam and women rights within a broader comparative. Bridging together leading scholars from diverse disciplines, it examines the complex and contingent historical relationships between religion, secularism democracy, law and gender equality.

The intend of this concerted venture is to scrutinize the multifaceted interaction between Islam, democracy, secularism and women's rights in order to make a critical and more fruitful contribution to the current debate on women and politics in Muslim countries. The exhibit altered volume fills a hole in the existing expositive expression by: a) bridging two currently distant threads of scholarly work: surrounding women's rights and Islam on the one hand and Islam and democracy on the other hand; b) locating the current intersection of Islam, gender and democracy in the broader filed of women's rights, religion and democracy in the countries like India, Israel, Spain, Poland and France.

To achieve two folded aims, the book (under review) is composed of eleven chapters, grouped under two parts with different aims and objectives. Part I under the subject matter "The Nexus of Religion, Gender and Democracy" consisting of 5 chapters (1-5

contributing respectively by *Jocelyne Cesari*, Jose Casanova, Joan W. Scott, Robert Hefner and Suzanne Shroter)

The common point of all contributors in the part I is two folded aims; a) What are the dominant religious and secular conceptions of women's rights of both civil society and state actors and how do they interact with different political forces and institutions to shape democracy? .b) How do women's rights activists shape international effort to exert pressure for human rights upon particular countries?

Chapters in part 1 examines state actions, including the rule of law and what kind of interaction and political mobilization it generates among religious movements and feminist activists and how it contributes to the shape of religious interpretations of women's rights. Looking at state actions vis-a-vis women's rights, Joan W. Scott argues in chapter 3 entitled "Secularism, Gender Inequality, and the French State" that even in democracies like France, the secular state adopted a gender approach to justify the separation of church and state. Robert W. Hefner emphasizes the chapter 4 "Islamic Law and Muslim Women in Modern Indonesia" the continuous tension between the state actions vis-a-vis women's rights in Indonesia and hermeneutics or legal-religious communities. Yuksel Sezgin in his chapter "Reforming Muslim Family Laws in Non-Muslim Democracies: Understanding the Role of Civil Courts as Agents of Social and Legal Change(pp.,)" argues that the position of the religious group vis-a-vis the state is a major factor in the changing interpretation of Islamic law and women's rights.

Part 2 under the subject matter "Localizing the interplay between Gender, law, Democracy in different national context" consisting 6 chapters (6-11, contributing respectively by Katherine Maeshall, Yuksel Sezgin, Vrinda Narain, Zibra Mir-Hosseini, Valentine Moghadam and Maila Stivens...) the contributors provides contextualized responses to questions raised and mentioned in different cultural and political settings. It also explores the situation of Muslim women's rights in minority conditions both in West (USA/European) and outside the West (India, Greece, and Israel).

To avoid the strong dichotomy and somewhat contradiction ways of analyzing the interplay between women's, Islam and democracy. The chapter 1 "State, Islam and Gender politics" argues that Muslim women rights are shaped by; a) the modernized forms of Islam linked to the emergence of the post-colonial state and b) the overall theological discussions of women's rights in Islam that take place within the state framework.(p.16)

Main subject matters discussed in the book;

- Focuses on women, religion, secularism, and democracy, over different religious conventions and national contexts.
- Looks at relatively the circumstance about developing Muslim democracies (Turkey, Tunisia, Senegal, Indonesia, and Malaysia) and in addition non-democratic situations (Iran or Morocco).

- Considers state policies vis-à-vis women and draw comparisons with the situation of women's rights in some Western (Catholic countries) and non-western democracies (India)
- Highlights the influence of transnational movements and feminist discourses, both Islamic and secular, on women's rights debates and policies in different national contexts. Provides an analytical framework for future research.

On the whole it is an excellent selection of analytical piece on gender, democracy and Islam. The book provides the new insights and is interesting work for scholar having savour to study things in comparative perspectives.