

Religious Fundamentalism: Towards a Political Economy Theory

Abul Barkat*

Abstract

This article attempts to develop a Political Economy Theory of religion-based fundamentalism, related extremism, and militancy. The religion used to construct the theory is Islam, and the space is primarily Bangladesh. However, the ground could have been any religion and the space, any country. In developing the Political Economy Theory of religion-based fundamentalism, the methodology deployed consists primarily the historical materialism, dialectics of induction and deduction methods, and synthesis after analysis. In line with this methodology, the relevant things were analysed and presented as follows: (1) appearance and essence of religious fundamentalism and associated extremism, (2) causalities of religious fundamentalism— both internal and external, (3) Evolution of Islam in Bengal (and Bangladesh)— the transformation from liberal to political Islam, (4) the essence of economics and politics of Islamist fundamentalism— both qualitative and quantitative, (5) development of Jihadism, (6) understanding the psychological basis of religion (Neurotheology) in conjunction with its economics and politics. Finally, it is argued that today's unipolar world is steered by the US-dominated Unitarian system of imperial ambitions, which subordinates (or tries to subordinate) all internal factors and causes. It leads to a global structure where external and internal forces form

* Professor and former Chairman, Department of Economics, & Professor and Founding Chairman, Department of Japanese Studies, Dhaka University, Bangladesh.
E-mail: barkatabul71@gmail.com

a single cause— form with two apparent differences. The internal causal forces are subjugated to the prime external force— the US imperial ambition aiming at establishing absolute ownership and control over critical strategic resources of the globe, namely land, water, energy, fuel, minerals, and space. Any means for the imperial actors and their subjugated agencies would be appropriate to maintain this balance. Here comes the pretext of religion as one of the most compelling historical tools. Therefore, organised religious fundamentalism is an integral natural outcome of imperialistic expansionism.

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1. Introduction

The *political economy*¹ of religious fundamentalism is a relatively new area of research not yet adequately addressed in the global political economy literature. This article purports to construct a General Political Economy Theory of Religious Fundamentalism (and associated extremism and militancy).

The term “fundamentalism”—as the religion’s reaction against scientific and

1. In this article, the categories ‘economics’ and ‘political economy’ are used interchangeably. Today’s “economic science”, in its origin, was known rightly as “political economy”. All the writings of the 17th to 19th century classical economists were titled political economy. For example, the title of the book by the classical economist Sir William Petty was *Political Arithmetic* (written in 1664 and published in 1690) and *The Political Anatomy of Ireland* (published in 1691), and that by Sir James Stuart was *An Inquiry into Principles of Political Economy* (published in 1767). Similarly the others were as follows: Adam Smith— *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of Wealth of Nations* (published in 1776), Jean Baptiste Say and Thomas Robert Malthus— (same title in both) *A Treatise on Political Economy* (published in 1803 and 1817, respectively)), David Ricardo— *Principles of Political Economy and Taxation* (1817), Leonard Sison— *New Principles of Political Economy* (1819), John Stuart Mill— *Principles of Political Economy* (1848), Karl Marx— *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859) and *Das Capital: Critique of Political Economy* (1867). A detailed analysis of the essence of transformation of the discipline of Political Economy in to Economics may be seen in the work of Barkat (2017a), *Poverty of Philosophy in Economics* (Arthonity Shastree Dorsoner Daridro; in Bangla).

secular culture— may not be a perfect one, but it is a helpful label for movements that, despite substantial differences, bear a strong family resemblance. Fundamentalism is a controversial category, but an objective meaning can be given to it in line with the following: *embattled faith; beleaguered tradition; withdrawal from the mainstream; creation of counter-culture; transformation of mythology into ideology; cultivation of theologies of rage, resentment, and revenge; the refusal of dialogue necessary for peace and continuity; defending beleaguered tradition using ritual truth in a globalising world that asks for reasons* (Barkat 2016a).

In essence, *religious fundamentalism* and associated *extremism* are a form of militant piety in religion. Fundamentalism is an embattled faith. Fundamentalism is evident in both great monotheisms (Christianity, Islam, and Judaism) and in other religions (Buddhism, Hinduism, even in Confucianism which is not a religion *per se*). The Muslim and Jewish fundamentalisms are not much concerned with doctrine, which is an essentially Christian preoccupation.

'Fundamentalisms' all follow a specific pattern— they are embattled forms of spirituality, which have emerged as a response to a perceived crisis. They are engaged in conflict with enemies whose secularist policies and beliefs seem inimical to religion itself. Fundamentalists do not regard this battle as a conventional political struggle but experience it as a cosmic war between the forces of good and evil. They fear annihilation and try to fortify their beleaguered identity employing a selective retrieval of certain doctrines and practices of the past. They often withdraw from mainstream society to create a counterculture to avoid contamination, yet fundamentalists are not impractical dreamers. They have absorbed the pragmatic rationalism of modernity. Under the guidance of charismatic leaders, they refine these 'fundamentals' to create an ideology that provides the faithful with a plan of action (Armstrong 2001). Fundamentalists— by turning the *mythos* of their religion into *logos* and transforming their complex mythology into a streamlined ideology— cultivate theologies of rage, resentment, and revenge (Barkat 2018). Fundamentalism is a refusal of dialogue in a world whose peace and continuity depend on it.

2. Literature on and Manifestations of Religious Fundamentalism

The Political Economy Theory of Religious Fundamentalism is not available in the relevant literature. Even the terminology 'Economics of Fundamentalism' is of the most recent origin. The author coined it in 2005, which included, among others, the necessary estimations about the size of the 'economy of fundamentalism' by broad sector-wise line items (see Barkat 2005a, 2005c, 2005d). However, no one since then used the term, let alone estimating and re-estimating the size and trends.

In the last 40-50 years, many scholars came up with different explanations and analyses on the different dimensions about the origins, causality, and implication of religions-based fundamentalism. However, meaningful treatment of religious fundamentalism from the viewpoint of political economy was almost not in existence. Most relevant of those scholars and their writings are as follows (only the name of the author with the title and year is mentioned): D. L. O'leary (1923), *Islam at the Cross Roads: A Brief Survey of the Present Position and Problems of the World of Islam*; G. H. Hansen (1979), *Militant Islam*; Emanuel Sivan (1985), *Radical Islam: Medieval Theology and Modern Politics*; Robin Wright (2001), *Sacred Rage: The Wrath of Militant Islam*; Bruce Lawrence (1995), *Defenders of God: The Fundamentalist Revolt against the Modern Age*; N. Levtzion (Ed. 1979), *Conversion to Islam*; Jakob Landau (1990), *The Politics of Pan-Islam: Ideology and Organization*; William Montgomery Watt (1988), *Islamic Fundamentalism and Modernity*; Johannes Janssen (1997), *The Dual Nature of Islamic Fundamentalism*; John Esposito (Ed., 1997), *Political Islam: Revolution, Radicalism or Reform?*; Saeed Abul Ala Maududi (2000), *The Political Theory of Islam*; Talal Asad (2003), *Formation of the Secular: Christianity, Islam and Modernity*; Barkat Abul (2005a, 2006a, 2006c), *Economics of Fundamentalism in Bangladesh*; Samir Amin (2007), *Political Islam in the Service of Imperialism*; Ayaz Ahmad (2008), *Islam, Islamism and the West*; Bassam Tibi (1998), *The Challenge of Fundamentalism: Political Islam and the New World Disorder*; Yusuf Choueiri (1990), *Islamic Fundamentalism*; Hamid Dabashi (2008), *Islamic Liberation Theology: Resisting the Empire*; Graham Fuller (2003), *The Future of Political Islam*; Richard Dawkins (2006), *The God Delusion*; Brahm Geoffrey and Tariq Madood (Eds., 2008), *Secularism, Religion and Multicultural Citizenship*; Leila Ahmed (1992), *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate*; Tariq Ali (2002), *The Clash of Fundamentalisms: Crusades, Jihads and Modernity*; James Piscatori (Ed., 1983), *Islam in the Political Process*; A. Croke (2009), *Resistance: The Essence of the Islamist Revolution*; M. Islam (2015), *Limits of Islam: Jamaat-e-Islami in Contemporary India and Bangladesh*; Barkat Abul (2013b), *Political Economy of Fundamentalism in Bangladesh*; Barkat Abul (2015a), *Imperialism and Religious Fundamentalism: A Treatise on political Economy with reference to Bangladesh*; Barkat Abul (2018), *Fundamentalism in Bangladesh: External and Internal Dimensions of the Political Economy of Militancy*.

In the relevant research literature, many opinions are expounded about the relation of 'war' with 'religion' or relation of conflict-collision-friction-revolt-revolution with 'religion'. Most of these 'opinions' indicate 'religion' as the 'root cause' behind war-collision-friction-revolt-revolution. For the large part, these

convictions uphold “religious factors as the root cause” of these sequels. A few discerns that “religion creates a favourable environment for these”. In the context of contemporary Iraq, Libya, Palestine, and Afghanistan— Noam Chomsky argued that imperialism (especially the US imperialism) had created a ‘base’ or ‘background’ for creating Islam religion-based militancy.

There is no such research where it is persuaded that ‘exploitation’, ‘imperialism’, and “epicentre-imperialism— the US imperialism” are the ‘main reasons’ behind the rise of religious fundamentalism and escalation of related militancy. Hence, the critical point is that no one has strung the whole matter into a general political economy theory by giving due consideration and analysing these causal relationships associated with its sources. It is most likely that no one has profoundly realized even the indispensableness of complex theoretical work of suitable formulation until now. Most have interpreted religion-based or religious fundamentalism as an instance of fundamentalism (in the sense of ‘example’) and its manifestation or ‘appearance’. Most have tried to comprehend religious fundamentalist militancy merely through its day-to-day visible revelations. The interpretation and analysis of these views have never been made with necessary scientific rigour.

It has become a matter of everyday life that we are listening and watching about many issues related to sectarianism, communalism, religious fundamentalism, and fundamentalist militancy in the print and electronic media. There are abounding variants of these visible forms or manifestations. There may be a short but essential list of what we have noticed and noticed, frequently, as glaring examples and manifestations of all these forms at home and abroad. Some of these are as follows:

1. The Socialist Soviet Union invaded and provided military support to establish socialism in Afghanistan. Following that, the US imperialism, in collaboration with Pakistan through the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), created their armed Talibanism, created Mullah Omar bin Laden and similar others; occupied Afghanistan; the reign of the war-lord and drug-lord expanded. On the contrary, it is also said that in the decade 1970s, in the border area of the then Soviet Union in the Afghanistan-Pakistan border (mainly in Khyber Pass region and Peshawar region), including Afghanistan, different types of madrassas, including Islamic militant training centres were established with the direct assistance of the CIA. To the Soviet Union, this was the pre-emption to invade the Soviets (Central Asian Republics) in the Afghan border region or the extirpation of the socialist social system. For these reasons, the Soviet Union, including forming a new government,

provided military support to Afghanistan. It implies that, on the one hand, the whole thing, such as the Soviet Union's effort to protect the socialist world system and on the other hand, create Islam religion-based militancy along with the supply of military force to resist any pursuit so that in no way, socialist form of state can be created in Afghanistan as intimidation for US imperialism. In the latter case, Islamization was one of the powerful anti-communist strategies of the United States.

2. A section of well-armed Muslims belonging to the Islamic States of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), known as the Islamic State (IS), has been involved in the war in some countries, including Syria, Iraq, and Yemen. The name of that war is 'Jihad.' Through Jihad, either they want to hold a particular area in their possession or occupy the state itself. All types of partition, including the Shia-Sunni partition and geo-nationalistic (in the case of Afghanistan, for example, those of Pashtun, Kazakh, Uzbek, Nuristani, Aimakh, Kazak, Turkmenistani) among the Muslims, are being utilized in these matters. It is worth mentioning that in using Islamic State (IS) in their activities, the US intelligence agency (CIA) has innovated the "End of the Time Narrative" (ETN). The ETN - as claimed and propagated by the CIA— is the last words of the Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (SAW) about the description of the last hours of the world. ETN claims that immediately before his demise Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (SAW) has said the following: "(1) Only Sunnis are real Muslims; the Shias and Ahmadis are not real Muslims; (2) the last bell of the earth will ring when the Westerners invade the city of Dabiq in northern Syria, and then the world's best warriors- the Mujahidin will start fighting against them".² It is worthy of note, as claimed according to ETN, during the end of his life in the city of Dabiq, Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said about ETN: the city of Dabiq is now known as IS headquarter and at the same time, "Dabiq" is also the name of IS website.
3. In Israel, the Jewish religion-based militancy is indiscriminately occupying the land, including the killing of Palestinian Muslims. This truculence is continuing nearly for the last one hundred years.

2. For details about 'End of the Time Narrative', see: Kirsten E. Schulze, 2009, "Indonesia—The Radicalisation of Islam"; Sahih Muslim, The Book of Tribulations and Portents of the Last Hour, Chapter: The Conquest of Constantinople, book 54, hadith 44, 'The Emergence of the Dajjal and the Descent of 'Eisa bin Mariam', <http://sunnah.com/muslim/54-44>.

4. In Pakistan, the destruction of institutions, including killing people in the name of religion, has become a routine matter.
5. In the name of religion, the India-Pakistan conflict over the Kashmir issue has continued for over 70 years.
6. In the northern province of India, Hindu fundamentalists (BJP), after wielding power on the grounds of religion, have banned eating cow meat by the Muslims (in 2017). Till now, hundreds of people have been killed on this issue. Not only that, as the ruling BJP's ideological guide organization RSS aspires to make India a "Hindu State". there is an attempt to make someone the Honourable President of the country nominated by RSS. However, in this regard, they are also bringing the low Caste-Dalit community to the forefront with a political purpose.
7. In the United States, the 'red neck white' belonging to the Christian religion has declared a crusade against those who belong to Islam (President Donald Trump categorically and openly says these).
8. In the Muslim-dominated Uyghur region of the People's Republic of China, wearing yashmak by the girls has been announced a ban.
9. The atrocity done to Muslims and continuing in the Arakan territory of Myanmar is genocide and crime against humanity. It is done using Theravada Buddhist religious fundamentalism. Notwithstanding, Buddhism says, "Killing a living body is a sin."
10. Fundamentalism is escalating in Bangladesh. Religion-based fundamentalism has created its economic basis— the Economic of Fundamentalism (I have presented in public since 2005). The fundamentalist militants have killed many people, destroyed many institutions; strengthened the economic basis of fundamentalism; suicidal women militants are not hesitating to sacrifice their lives (children are also not spared); foreigners are also being murdered by the militants (1 July 2016, Holly Artisan Bakery); now 133 fundamentalist militant organizations are functional; one could hardly find a person who was not afraid of life seeing the way the Hefazate Islam captured Dhaka city on 5 May 2013. As per the 'political demands (!)' of the Hefazate Islam, the content in the textbooks has already changed. It is accelerating the process of Islamization of Knowledge (IOK). The education of Quomi Madrassa is being accorded an equal status of higher degree; the voice is raised for demolishing the sculpture of Greek goddess erected in front of the country's highest court. On the whole, it is inevitable that after this, all secular and folk cultural traditions will be evicted; animosity to women

and anti-democratic evil forces are increasing - these are accelerating religion-based sectarianism. In a nut shell, the inherent power of secularism is curtailed, the task of occupying state power in the name of religion- Islam is expanding rapidly.

11. Persecution of Muslims in the southern part of Thailand is a history of many days. As a retort, Muslims are also using weapons there. It is said that al-Qaeda (alternatively, al-Qaida, a transnational extremist Salafist militant organization founded in 1988) and IS have strong links with these incidents.
12. In Yemen, due to suicide bombing, women and children are killed. Recently, the most brutal incident happened in Yemen in Mukalla City on 27 June 2016. On that day, 38 innocent women and children were killed by suicide bombing.
13. Due to a bomb attack at Turkey's Kamal Ataturk Airport, 45 people had to give their lives (28 June 2016).
14. In the name of religion, bombing attack has been made at different times in the different regions of Malaysia.
15. In the Philippines, the 'Moro' militants have become desperate to form a sharia-based state.
16. In various cities, including Baghdad of Iraq, bombing is now a regular occurrence. The latest major catastrophic incident took place on 3 July 2016 at the busiest supermarket in Baghdad. On that day, at midnight, in addition to the killing of 308 people, hundreds of people were injured by a car bomb attack.
17. In three cities in Saudi Arabia, suicide bombings took place on 4 July 2016.
18. In several places, including the police station bombing in Indonesia on 5 July 2016.
19. With thirteen (13) conditions, a sanction was imposed on Qatar's natural gas-rich Middle East State. Instigated by the United States, the sanctions have been imposed by four border countries of Qatar, namely the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, and Bahrain. After that, the United States had a large-scale arms trade with Qatar and took a share of gas and oil; moreover, the United States has already built a vast airbase in Qatar. Notwithstanding, one of the major allegations against Qatar is that the country supplies arms to IS, and the office of the Afghan Taliban has been set up in Qatar. On this, Qatar's King Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani confessing to the western media, has said, "*Yes, the Taliban have been allowed to establish offices*

here in Qatar. However, we have done it complying with the request of the US President. We did not invite the Taliban. The United States wanted to have a venue for dialogue with the Taliban and requested us to be the host country of this dialogue? We have become the host of this dialogue at the request of the United States” (for details, see 29 October 2017 interview to CBS News correspondent Charlee Rose by Qatar’s King Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani).

20. Using religion, including Islam and other religions, has become relatively common in countries ruled by autocratic regimes and monarchs.
21. Religious and/or communal conflicts-infights-riots among tribes and clans are now a common form worldwide.

After listing one of the many appearances and manifestations of religion-based fundamentalism, it would be necessary to note two things. First, the intensity and depth of religion-based conflicts are high in the countries and territories endowed with rich natural resources (land, water, forest, minerals) and have geo-political advantages. Second, some of the examples cited above are only a few of the hundreds of examples in this regard, and perhaps many more critical examples have been inadvertently omitted. The reasons for this are more important than the examples *per se*. Here, in terms of causality, two things need special attention. First, we see the example—these are only incidents, not the cause of the incidents. These are the external or visible objects of the main object. The appearance of the object and its essence are not the same. Second, what is the causality of these visible events? The question is straightforward, but the answer is complicated and contentious.

Among the things that are often mentioned as an outward-looking reason for what I said above are: issues originated from economic inequalities, issues originated from social inequalities, issues originated from frustration-despondence, issues originated from moral values, issues originated from repugnance, issues originated from cultural estrangement, isolation, and exclusion, issues originated from an identity crisis, issues originated not only in this world but also issues concerned with after-life. Whatever is presented above is not the root cause for the emergence and development of religious fundamentalism and fundamentalist militancy. The tendency to forward these causes as the ‘main cause’ is quite popular. In my view, these are not causes - they are derived from ‘causes’. and the ‘real cause’ is more intrinsic that needs to be searched much deeper— under the carpet.

3. Understanding Religious Fundamentalism –the Cause-Effect Philosophy

'Effect' resembles the cause or consequence of cause. Since we are talking about 'cause' and 'effect'— it is imperative to mention a few cardinal points before presenting our (my) original points, including its analysis in determining the cause and consequence of religious fundamentalism and related militancy. The subject here is philosophical.

The pertinent issues of philosophy are discussed below. The inevitable relationship between two objects or two phenomena is the causal relation. In this case, the phenomenon (or event or incidence) that occurs earlier is the 'cause' and which latterly happens as its outcome is the 'effect'. Despite that, the cause-effect relation is a relation of two events or two objects, it does not necessarily occur as an effect or a cause. For the sake of convenience of our realization, we try to think of two events separately from other events. However, in a real sense, the event we call the effect co-occurs as the effect of another event, and what we call a cause that also takes place as an effect or result of another event. The reality is that a holistic causality binds the whole universe of matter (object). Therefore, the overall cause of an effect is more significant than a specific cause. On that ground, it is possible to understand the specific cause of an event based on its overall cause. The epistemology of the science of causality is that the causal relation between events or objects is not a matter of imagination of our mind; the causal relation is not an object or event, so the relationship is not visible. Since we intend to understand causation, it is imperative to note that correlation failing to establish causality is the death of causation (Pearl and Mackenzie 2019).

It is necessary to make the above philosophy more comprehensible. The issue may not be as difficult to comprehend as it appears. An example of the relationship between fire and smoke would suffice. Fire and smoke— both we can see in our eyes. However, we cannot see the causal relationship between fire and smoke; we cannot see that the fire is the cause of the smoke, and the smoke is the effect or result of the fire. So, the philosophical empiricism that must be acknowledged in constructing the formula for a political economy related to "the rise and spread of sectarianism, fundamentalism, and militancy" is that causal relations are not an object; it is not even human imagination. The event of action-reaction of an object is not a matter of human imagination, but this action-reaction forms the causal relation of the object.

What we see with an open eye is its outward appearance or form. That may be the external condition of the object, maybe of the event, and maybe of the animal world, including plants of nature. None of these, which we see in the open eye or by the sense-perception of how these things are presented before us or become visible, are the essence of the subject (i.e., object, event, nature) or

content. Here lies the real difference between cause and effect or causal and consequence. Nonetheless, the subject is generally called philosophical it is epistemological– which applies equally to any discipline.

Let us assume the context of a ‘culture of injustice’. Is it the reason that people become the victim of injustice, i.e., they are deprived of impartial judgment and proper justice, judgment in a particular society, as because there are problems in judicial law (?) and/or judges are not competent in judicial matters and/or plaintiff-defendant (accused)-witness tells a lie or conceal the truth and/ or to deliver justice there is limited power in the hands of judges and/ or judge feels embarrassed in making justice and/or judge do not feel any attachment-aversion? None of this is a natural barrier to impartial judgment, proper justice/judgment, and legal justice. As a matter of rule, the law works against the poor. It works much rapidly when the poor-weak farmer (the powerless), who fails to repay a small amount of Tk 10,000 as agricultural loan, is tied to his waist with a rope in a certificate case and taken to the police station the daylight and sent to the jail. After half a century of our liberation war–this is an excellent ‘justice’! However, when someone is misappropriating hundreds of thousands of millions of Taka from state-owned banks moves boastfully-safely-unperturbed-freely home and abroad–is he (or they) brought under trial? The simple answer is: We cannot try them. It is because the real exploiters at the international and national levels have collectively created a system of impenetrable rent-seekers – the agents of the system who do not create any wealth by themselves but only grab the wealth created by others. State-government-politics is a loyal, subordinate (enslaved person) entity of that rent-seekers system. In an external sense, the rent-seeker system originated from exploitation is not, however, visible. Only visible is fundamentalism and fundamentalist militancy. Therefore, it will not be possible to escape the discussion, which wastes time if the cause and effect philosophy is misunderstood or confused. Also, it will not be logical.

As discussed above, generally, the same concept applies to everything else-‘fundamentalism’, ‘sectarianism’, ‘fundamentalist militancy’, ‘killing people using petrol bombs’. Some people decided that they would host the flag of religion very high and fight for the religion if necessary, make a crusade to form a religious state, kill people–none of this is the real reason for the emergence and spread of sectarianism or fundamentalism or fundamentalist militancy. All these are visible, external manifestations and appearances of the actual reason (the reality), and the reasons lie much beyond manifestation and are deeply ingrained.

As stated earlier, the causal relationship is not an object, and a causal relation is not even our imagination. The causal relation arises from the action-reaction of the object and is related to the whole; the occurrence of the action-reaction is not a matter

of our imagination. To investigate, on the one hand, from the slave age through the feudal age through modern capitalism, it will have to go at the root of the political economy of the world dominance of US imperialism. On the other hand, by moving from the local through the global war, it is to know without the spell of infatuation the true history of the aim-purpose of militarization of space including the whole universe (the reader should not think that I am unaware of things of substance beyond political economy). Moreover, that history of the political economy of the roots will tell that exploitation is the real cause of the economic-political-social-cultural-ideological war of the US imperialism aspiring world dominance spreading from local to a specific part of the region, from specific region to state, from state to alliance of states. The cause is 'exploitation'— more exploitation; even without any material production, exploitation by using 'intelligence' and 'power' which, in essence, ultimately is a matter of the "rent-seeking system".

The construction of political economy concerning the reasons behind religious fundamentalism and fundamentalist militancy probably needs a much deeper inquiry. Because, on the one hand, there exist exploitation-led poverty, discrimination, deprivation, disparity, inequality; on the other hand, ignoring the rule of nature-concentration of wealth (income, asset, health, education) in the hands of a few people. All this causes enslavement of our mind and cognition system primarily by religion-based myths. Many of us, even whom we recognize as enlightened people, say 'a man is poor because he is poor', 'a man is poor because he is not industrious', 'a man is poor because he is not economical', 'a man is poor because he is not intelligent', 'a man is poor because he is lazy', 'a man is poor because he is disorderly and undisciplined', 'a man is poor because he is knowledge poor'. All these 'idea-innovations' are different types of unethical and completely nonsensical and false 'poverty theory' aiming at belittling people. This thinking bears an inseparable relationship with "religion" and "religion-based militancy".

We listened to a story about our original sin (!) behind the poverty of the poor and wealth of the rich. As Karl Marx maintained, the mythical story of original sin goes like this: "*Adam bit the apple, and thereupon sin fell on the human race. Its origin is supposed to be explained when it is told as an anecdote of the past. In times long gone by, there were two sorts of people: the diligent, intelligent, and above all, frugal elites; the other, lazy rascals, spending their substance, and more, in riotous living. The legend of theological original sin tells us certainly how man came to be condemned to eat his bread in the sweat of his brow; but the history of economic original sin reveals to us that there are people to whom this is by no means essential. Never mind! Thus it came to pass that the former sort accumulated wealth, and the latter sort had at last nothing to sell except their own skins. And from this original sin dates the poverty of the great majority that,*

*despite all its labour, has up to now nothing to sell but itself, and the wealth of the few that increases constantly although they have long ceased to work. Such insipid childishness is every day preached to us in defence of property. M. Thiers, e.g., had the assurance to repeat it with all the solemnity of a statesman to the French people, once so spiritual. But as soon as the question of property crops up, it becomes a sacred duty to proclaim the intellectual food of the infant as the one thing fit for all ages and for all stages of development. In actual history it is notorious that conquest, enslavement, robbery, murder— briefly force— play the great part. In the tender annals of Political Economy, the idyllic reigns from time immemorial. Right and 'labour' were from all time the sole means of enrichment, the present year of course always excepted. As a matter of fact, the methods of primitive accumulation are anything but idyllic".³ It might sound good to listen to these 'apparently' unworthy conversations. However, with these, it is impossible to construct the theory of political economy (general formula) of religious fundamentalism and related militancy—anybody can think these. Nonsensical thinking gives birth to another nonsense. As it continues, the extended reproduction of nonsensical thinking continues. Arguably, now we can come to the context of constructing related theory. Before that, it might be of some use to listen to what philosopher Bertrand Russell has said: "*One of the gravest defects of religion is the fact that it can be used to keep the poor contented with their lot, which is very convenient for the rich.*"*

Religious fundamentalism, fundamentalist militancy, sectarianism, absence of justice or culture of injustice, criminalization (economic, political, social, cultural), maladministration and lousy governance, anarchy, tyranny, autocracy, despotism, bribery, corruption, poverty, discrimination, inequality— none of these are an isolated, fragmented and compartmentalized issue. If each is treated as a different notion (in the sense of category or idea), then each is interrelated. The structure of the theory of the political economy that I have tried to construct inevitably follows the basic argument that although each of these notions seems to be an apparent cause of the other, in a real sense, ultimately it is not the cause it is instead a resemblance of the cause. For instance, it is often thought that 'poverty-discrimination-inequality' is the leading cause of 'religious fundamentalism'. It is not right (and not even wrong), even not vice versa. Judging from the standpoint of the relationship between fire and smoke that I

³. For greater details about the so-called primitive accumulation, see Karl Marx, Capital, Volume 1, Part 8. (Marx, Karl. Capital: A Critical Analysis of Capitalist Production. Volume 1: translated by Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling, pp. 50-502, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited).

spoke about earlier, these notions of smoke are not the cause but rather the result of the cause, where a fire is a cause. So, in this case, the logical question arises—what is the reason for “poverty-discrimination-inequality”? In the final judgment, that reason will partly be the primary determinant—the leading cause of emergence, development, expansion, conflict-collision of all the relevant notions, including religion-based fundamentalism and fundamentalist militancy. Perhaps that is why Noam Chomsky says, “*One way for us (the USA) to reduce worldwide terrorism is to stop engaging in it.*” Furthermore, Howard Zinn says, “*Suicide terrorism stops when we (the USA) stop intervening abroad.*”

In my view, the primary determinant or regulating cause behind the emergence, rise, and development of religious fundamentalism (and associated extremism and militancy) is ‘exploitation’— the exploitative capitalist free market structure. However, this form of exploitation is not the same as the traditional Marxian form, where the main factor is ‘industrial capital’. This form is quite different, originating from ‘rent seeking’ under the financialization of capital. The financialised capital has divorced traditional politics— it is no longer subservient to politics, instead of the opposite— politics has become subservient to financialised capital. Another distinctive dimension is that although this exploitation process is indigenous, it is no longer bound within the home country; it is international. On the one hand, the epicentre-imperialism US’s absolute predominance over the world, such as this exploitation (that is, cause); on the other hand, the consequences or retribution arising from exploitation serve as a powerful influencing and triggering factor. So, in the final judgment, exploitation and appropriation of resources produced by others and to create alienation and expansion of this exploitation is the root cause of emergence, development, and expansion of sectarianism, religion-based fundamentalism, and fundamentalist militancy in the society.

As to how does this whole process works in society would be as follows:

1. Capitalist rent-seekers invest money-wealth-power-influence as capital.
2. The purpose of this investment is to expand all related capital and to keep the exploitation system self-expanding at any cost by appropriating (that is, by exploiting) the outcome of the invested capital (surplus). Here, the self-propagation or self-expansion of capital occurs, and as a result, the capital owner becomes more vital than before.
3. Capital is invested, from all ideologies to ideological institutions representing the societal superstructure. These institutions include State legislatures, judiciary, executive department, media, religious ideology, related institutions, political, economic, and socio-cultural organizations serving the interest of all forms of capital subservient to financialised

capital. This process does not stop at any stage; it continues. It is a continuous or intermittent process crossing various stages of circulation-in-perpetuity. If this process stops, the outcomes of exploitation of the rent-seekers or the various means, such as sectarianism, religion-based fundamentalism, militancy, will cease and gradually collapse. If the process slows down, the speed of retribution or consequences will also decrease, and it will gradually become languid and lose strength. Although the whole thing is similar to Karl Marx's "Circulation of capital, including its metamorphoses, rotation, and turn-over", because of different features of capitalistic development during the period after Marx, rent-seekers of financialised capital will be included with this (about which Marx did not speak much).

All types of crazy people can be found among the capitalist-businessman except one. No such single crazy person can be found who wants to get the same amount of money in return (that is, USD one million) as an outcome of which he regularly (as a general rule) invests (suppose, USD one million) as capital. The general argument is that if he invests USD one million, he would like to get more than USD one million (certainly not equal or less) as an outcome/return of investment. How will he get more money than what he invests, where to get it, what to do to get more? To get it, he will have to purchase such a commodity by the money he spent as capital, which can create more value than its own value. Take, for example, the owner of industrial capital. Indeed, in this case, in the present world, a good example is the 'capital of military-industrial complex' and 'rent-seeking' capital.

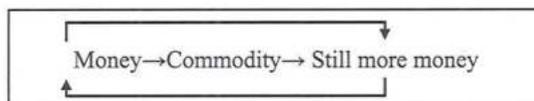
As a buyer, the owner of the capital will first come to the market with money; buy labour force (generally called labour) and raw materials for production, including production machinery. Machinery and raw materials of production do not have such inherent quality or characteristic that they can create more value than their own value. They can transform raw materials; the form changes, but the value does not change (increase or decrease). In this case, if purchased, the only product whose value increases is the labour force that can generate more value than its own value (that is, more than wages; wage is the price of labour-power). The additional value, i.e., the surplus value, is created in production, but that is precisely realized when the capitalist will bring his product (whose value is hidden in the surplus value as a necessity for exploitation) to the market seller. After that, he will return to the market as a buyer. The process of buyer-seller, seller-buyer, buyer-seller will continue. So, at first, he is the buyer, then the seller, and then the buyer again. As a buyer, he will first convert his money capital into productive capital (the first phase of the rotation and metamorphoses). Then, in

the production process, the value of the productive machinery and the raw materials included in the produced commodity, workers transform it by their labour and create new value, including the reproductive value and surplus-value of the labour force. In the second stage of the rotation of capital, the productive capital of the first phase will be transformed into commodity capital. Then, in the third stage of the rotation of capital, the capitalist will sell the product in the market not as the buyer but as the seller. He will realize the surplus value generated in the production process. In this case, the commodity capital of the second stage of the rotation will again be transformed into the money capital of the first stage. However, money in the last stage will include surplus value, which the capitalist will appropriate, and this is exploitation—to continue this exploitation process is the inherent characteristic of the capitalist economy. This relentless exploitation process increases alienation, along with the increase in poverty, discrimination, and inequality at the bottom of society. Moreover, at the upper level, richness-wealth-resource-property increases, the share of the people at the bottom of society in the national wealth and national income reduces; and the share of the people at the upper-level increase rapidly, and at the same time, all forms of crisis in capitalism originates in this process (the forms which have different manifestations, including the business cycle). It is important to note that in the Unitarian global capitalism, on the one hand, as in the epicentre of imperialism (in the USA in the present world), the accumulation and concentration of global capital will take place, just at the same time, the common crisis of capitalism will increase monotonically.

What I have said so far reflects that the owner of the capital at first comes to the market with money capital—as a buyer. However, if it so happens that the capitalist is not coming to the market not as the buyer, but as the ‘occupier’; forcibly, he wants to occupy and have control over the sky and space, including land, water, natural resources. It is precisely what the global rent-seekers are doing. In this process of traditional circulation-rotation-metamorphoses of capital, the accumulation and condensation of global capital are now such that different types of rent-seekers who do not create any wealth themselves and plunder the wealth created by others has accelerated and will continue to accelerate the whole process. In the case of ‘occupancy’ capital, what happened in the rotation of capital is not the main issue. The main issue is plundering—more and more plundering, as a result of which it is possible to ensure absolute ownership and control over the world’s four fundamental-strategic resources- land, water, fuel- energy-mineral, and space. In this regard, the method can be of many types: war, religion, trippy tricks of international trade and commerce, trickery in the exchange rate of currency, topsy-turvy of governments in different countries, everything.

Hence, what I have said so far with the purpose of political-economic formulation of religious fundamentalism and fundamentalist militancy, its basic premise is: in the capitalist monetary system, the formula of the general circulation of capital will be as depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 1: A simple form of the general circulation of capital



In reality, if this is the essence of the capitalist system of exploitation, then in that case in the final judgment, how the system of exploitation can be the root cause of the emergence, development, and expansion of the culture of injustice, sectarianism, religious fundamentalism, and fundamentalist militancy? In that case, what would be the type of transformed formula of the political economy mentioned above? I have alluded earlier to the underlying implication of this formula.

Notwithstanding, because of the issue's great importance, I need to point out some more arguments before forwarding my proposed formulation of the Political Economic Theory of Religious Fundamentalism. Can the situation be like this when the socio-economic system is exploitative, but justice and equity prevail? Some might say it can be (this is possible). They will cite an example, from the Scandinavian social-democrat ruled/governed country to the modern United Kingdom and the United States of America. This idea is a central delusion. Otherwise, why did Joseph Stiglitz write the book- *The Price of Inequality*, Paul Krugman - *End this Depression Now*, Thomas Piketty- *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, and Noam Chomsky- *The Failed States* to tell us about the transformation of capitalism (though none of them advocates socialism)? In those advanced capitalist countries, greater civil society, even at the individual level are deprived of many types of equitable facilities and the means of enhancing capabilities; and at a greater level, the state-governments of those countries, from occupying Iraq by the world-lord US imperialist, are either directly involved in different countries, including the Middle East, with various forms of misdeeds antagonistic to nature and/or in the UN, World Bank, IMF, World Trade Organization, International Intellectual Property (!) Rights Protection Organization takes a strong position against the weak in protecting their interests. So, in an exploitative society, be it a single country-based or a collective coalition—from different types of injustice to various forms of religious riots relating to the community-race, clan, tribe-religion is likely to be a common denominator, an issue of the general formula. We must remember that an 'individual' is a social animal, socialized—not a single inhabitant of an island like Robinson Crusoe.

Before elaborating the proposed formula, I would like to make it more explicit than in the equation “exploitation→right”— ‘exploitation’ is the cause and ‘right’ is the effect. The effect that evolves from exploitation will embody the ‘right of the strong’ and the ‘dispossession of rights of the weak’ (the ‘Thucydides Principle’). Again, when the equation is “right→exploitation”, then right is visible as the cause, and ‘exploitation’ is visible as the effect. All these are the externality of cause-effect—the visible form. In fact, ‘exploitation’ is the cause of visible ‘dispossession of rights’ in the final judgment. Thus, without understanding the actual formula and not “admitting the context of exploitation as the regulating factor”, if anyone says that injustice-sectarianism-religious fundamentalism-fundamentalist militancy-corruption-misrule—are eliminated, then all problems will be solved—in that case, I will say, actually he or she did not understand or want to understand the political economy of the relevant issue, or it will be inconvenient if he or she understands or more than that (in that situation, I have nothing to do except to feel sorry about the humbleness of his perception and/or actual courage; I have no obligation to make them realize). Avoiding the context of exploitation, the eulogizeragent groups of “civil society class” and “intellectual class” says these; in my judgment, ideologically, they are subservient to imperialist superpowers. That is why avoiding the issue of root cause they deal with national and international airy issues (talking about these by avoiding the root cause is undoubtedly airy), such as injustice, sectarianism, religious fundamentalism, fundamentalist militancy, corruption, lack of good governance, climate change, and by indulging all these they use all kinds of publicity-broadcasting media including mass media and social media to distract people’s conscientization process. However, this is again the main form of the political economy of mass media and the publicity-broadcasting media.⁴

Here, it is more important to mention that when exploitation— by traversing the national boundary – takes an international form, the absence of rights and

4. The essence of the political economy of the mass media is like this: All kinds of mass media ultimately protect the interests of the owners who are mainly rent-seekers (who do not create any wealth themselves, forcibly seize the wealth of others); they are again the controller of the state, government, politics; The same characteristics are applicable to international mass media, but their position is at a higher level, where the local mass media is mainly subservient to them in terms of level of orderliness. Censorship in the mass media basically means self-censorship; Feature articles in the mass media or ‘maintaining silence’ are “tacit collective actions”, the main task of the media is to mobilize bias in terms of incentives to ownership, constraints, organization, market and political equity which finally protect the interests of the regulatory class or group (See these in details, Edward S. Herrmann and Noam Chomsky, 1994, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*, pp. x11, 1-2, 13-15, 35, 303, 306).

injustice which prevails in the relatively weak country are also transmitted internationally beyond the borders of a particular country; signifying that, it is transformed into a subordinate entity of international-global exploitation system. For example, under the exclusive domination of the US imperialism worldwide, this is an adverse situation opposing to protect the existence in a judgment-free and independent entity of “right judgment-logical justice-impartial judgment-sovereignty”. These derive from the grand strategies developed by Dick Cheney-Ronald Rumsfeld-Colin Powell and implemented by the US imperialist administration. Besides, the US Presidents pursue this strategy with all aggressiveness, which will not change soon. Albeit this strategy of US-imperialism, the absolute authority of international-global exploitation is currently visible in the Muslim-dominated oil-gas-mineral-rich Middle East. However, there is no rationale to contemplate that the situation will be geographically restricted only to these regions in the future. Here ‘religion’ is not a causal factor. The main thing is the global exploitation of the world lords, of which we are only an integral part. The main issue is the capacity of the world-lord for expansion of the empire and absolute supremacy and also unopposed implementation of that rapacity. In this case, in the name of “war against terrorism”, 9/11 has been used, continually being used. It will be used as an instrument and a pretext to create terrifying situations and oppression and suppression at any scale. However, in the final judgment, the only thing that will remain as the primary root is “exploitation, further exploitation”—no matter the form and method of exploitation.

To sustain the system of exploitation-in-perpetuity— the imperialist power needs to proceed in a planned way. One of the most effective components of this plan is ‘religion’. This is clearly understood from a few examples of the relation of Islam-based fundamentalism with the existence and growth of imperialism. Imperialism—the US and the British have used Islam differently at different times in their interest to create their obedience in the Muslim world and suppress the existence of progressive forces in the state power (so that the ‘exploitation and further exploitation’ equation retains). Following are some of its examples⁵:

5. Prabhat Patnaik, 2003a, “Of Finance and Fascism”, in K. N. Pannikkar and Sukumar Muralidharan (Eds.). *Communism, Civil Society and the State: Reflections on a Decade of Turbulence*. pp. 81-82; Prabhat Patnaik, 2003b, “Imperialism and Terrorism”, in *The Retreat to Unfreedom: Essays in Emerging World Order*. pp. 105-110; Ayaz Ahmad, (2008), “Islam, Islamism and the West” In Panitch, L. and C. Leys (Eds.) *Socialist Register 2008: Global Flashpoints*. Vol. 44; Amin Saikal, 2003, “Islam and the west: Conflict or Cooperation?” pp. 5, 62-68; Samir Amin, (2007), “Political Islam in the Service of Imperialism”, *Analytical Monthly Review*, Vol. 5, No. 9, pp.6-8.

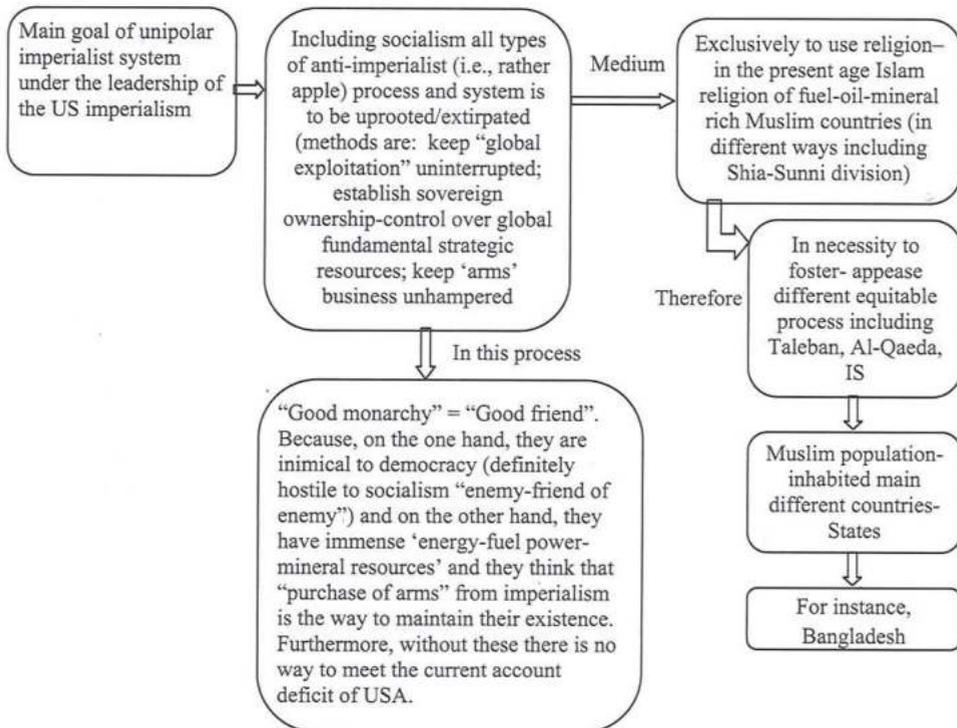
1. Around the year 1920, the British colonial power created the “Muslim Brotherhood Party” to protect autocracy in Egypt and prevent the rise of the secular and anti-imperialist Wafd party. Not only that, after the death of Egypt’s nationalist leader, President Jamal Abdel Nasser, members of the Muslim Brotherhood who fled to Saudi Arabia were brought back to Egypt under the direct supervision of the CIA led by US imperialism. In the long run, the result of this plan in the fall of a relatively long time government in Egypt imbued with the non-sectarian-democratic-nationalist spirit and ascending of Muslim Brotherhood into power.
2. With Iran’s President Mosaddek, when the Tudeh Party (Communist Party) alliance nationalized oil resources, then uprooted that government directly by CIA-led military coup Reza Shah Pahlavi was sworn into power as king (Reza Shah Pahlavi is used to name as “king of all kings”).
3. The CIA was directly involved in the Communist killings in Indonesia and Sudan.
4. The “United Front of Asia and the African States” established in 1955 at the Bandung Conference was abolished later. The “Islamic Conference” was created to inspire Islam religion-based politics in the Muslim world, and the United States was the primary mediator of this initiative.
5. In the initial stage, Israel supported Hamas (in collusion with US imperialism) to enfeeble the secular democratic movement of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in Palestine.
6. The US intelligence agency created the Taliban and other Islamic militant organizations in Afghanistan under the direct supervision of the CIA.

Based on the above cause-effect analysis, there is no scope to doubt that ‘exploitation’ is the primary determinant and regulating factor of sectarianism, religion-based fundamentalism, fundamentalist militancy, corruption, misgovernance, and despotism. Moreover, to accelerate this exploitation, a method of rent-seeking have been included, which also may have been there earlier, but not so aggressive as before; and not ‘scientific’ as it is now (with the externality of which many ‘sensational’ information to make one feel giddy including WikiLeaks, Panama Papers, Paradise Papers has already been exposed/transpired).

However, based on the understanding of the dynamics of the global political economy of the last 40-50 years, there is no reason to think that capital owners and rent-seekers are different identities. The owners of the capital are either, in one breath, the owners of the capital or the rent-seekers, or the owners of the pure

capital are now subordinate entities to the rent-seekers. These rent-seekers are, in essence, a product of the financialisation of capital. They include a group of businessmen dealing with war weapons to military outfits and their high-powered less-visible agents and agent groups who are engaged in regime change changing governments in various countries ('the rotten apples'), individual-group occupying science, group occupying technology, individual-group occupying media, broker (looking after the interest) groups of large scale infrastructural construction to significant contracts in different countries, owners group of fundamental-strategic resource-property, group upholding ideals of the unified imperialist system. The more crucial is that the epicentre imperialism— US imperialism— leads in these matters. One more thing needs to be mentioned to present the complete form of what I have said, including the analysis in developing the political economy theory of religious fundamentalism; and that is the goal of the imperialist system is to link up any single country such as Bangladesh belonging Muslim religion with the monarchic Middle East, an Islam-based militancy. For ease of comprehension, it is depicted in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Goal of the Imperialist System, Monarchic Middle-East, Islam religion-based militancy, and Bangladesh: Linkages



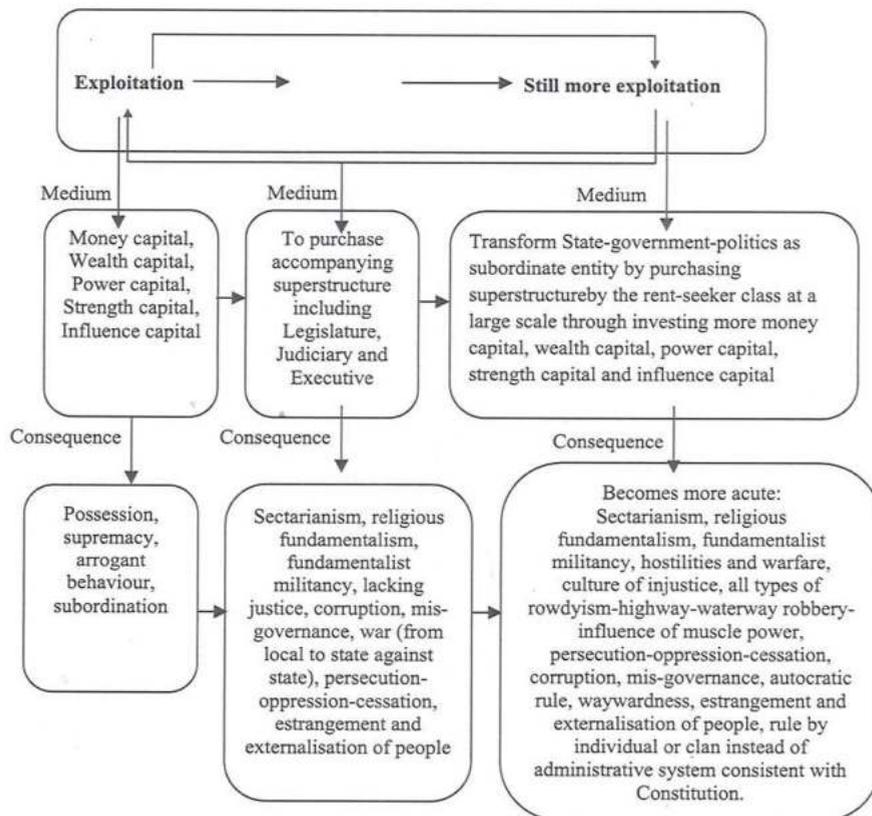
The epicentre-US imperialism's cardinal aim of a unipolar imperialist system is all types of anti-imperialist processes and systems (those who are 'rotten apple' as enshrined in the 'rotten apple theory'), including socialism is to be uprooted. Because the process of 'global exploitation' of a single imperialist system is to continue absolute unilateral ownership, sole authority, control, and dominance over global fundamental strategic resources, and the trading of their military-industrial complex (arms trade) is to be kept unimpaired. In this continuous process, the 'good monarchy' or 'good friend' or 'people like us' must be kept together because they have plentiful energy-fuel-mineral resources. Their "weaknesses, fragility, vulnerability, and capacity to purchase arms"—constitute necessary conditions for their existence. At the same time, without these, there is no other way to dispel the current account deficit of US imperialism (as well as other imperialism). The issue is purely economic.

Moreover, in this economic equation, among other things (in terms of time and context), 'religion' or (in the present age) Islam is used. Because one-fifth of the world's population following this religion (whose comparable number is increasing gradually) own one-fourth of the "energy-fuel-oil-energy-minerals" of the world. At the same time, they have a "geostrategic position." Therefore, a unipolar imperialism system needs to satisfy-nourish al-Qaeda, IS, and different processes which are homogenous in nature and alike in form; there is a necessity to intervene in the major countries practising Muslim religion, among which Bangladesh is prominent (at least, in the China-India equation including the geographically-centred Bay of Bengal).

Based on the analysis which I have presented so far, my last statement for the time being regarding the politico-economic formulation of religion-based fundamentalism and fundamentalist militancy is as follows:

In the early days of pure capitalism, the 'rent-seekers' were not the variable of crucial importance. However, when capitalism started taking the shape of unitarian global form under the US imperialism (unitarian capitalism is headed now by the US imperialism) since then the all-pervading equation of pure capitalism "money→commodity→still more money" has adopted a transformed form where rent-seekers has appeared as controlling factor of the political pyramid of wealth-pyramid and creation of wealth. Besides, these rent-seekers control the global wealth in various ways, prominent being religion, sectarianism, religion-based fundamentalism, and fundamentalist militancy. Then, in the final analysis, the circulation formula for the rotation of the political economy of cause-effect related to "sectarianism, religion-based fundamentalism, and fundamentalist militancy" took the shapes as shown in Figures 3 and 4.

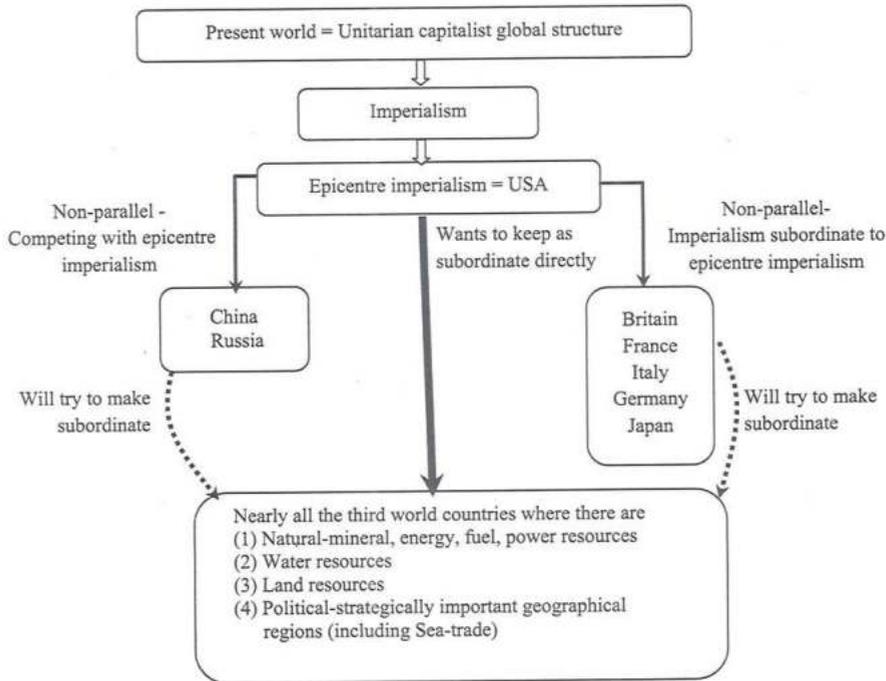
Figure 3: Circulation formula of the political economy of cause-effect related to sectarianism, religion-based fundamentalism, and fundamentalist militancy



4. Religious Fundamentalism: External and Internal Causal Relations

The *political economy of religious fundamentalism* can be viewed as a concentrated expression of religion-based communal politics to capture state power using religion as a pretext. It contradicts the secular approach to people, smothering and decimating the free, unfettered outlook. It launched a vicious onslaught on the spirit of secularism embedded in the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh in 1972 following the 1971 Liberation War. The act of satisfying the people's hopes and aspirations turned out to be a fiasco. At the same time, the erosion of a secular democratic mindset also occurred. Besides encouraging the growth of fundamentalism and its economic agents and interests, these factors have given birth to the institutions that turned favourable to their expanded reproduction – economic, political, social, and cultural. Consequently, the political economy of religious fundamentalism and extremism came into being.

Figure 4: Why the epicentre imperialism will make others subordinate in the Unitarian capitalist global structure? Pyramid indicating the order of subordinates.



The rise of socialism in the first half of the last century and its disintegration during the end of the century; economic crisis in the developed capitalist world; the aggressive attitude of imperialism and polarisation of the world, War and invasion of Afghanistan-Iraq-Libya-Syria, Western caricature by the name of “War on Terror” and the rise of unjust globalisation—all contributed to the growth of Islamic religion-based fundamentalism and associated extremism and militancy in the world. Imperialism has played a significant role in the speedy rise of religious fundamentalism and extremism in some parts of the world. It might be evident, among others, from the pertinent question: Who created Talibanism, Molla Omar, Osama Bin Laden, and the Islamic States Movement?⁶

The global communities find a subtle touch of irony as they bestow their concentration upon the fact that those rich and powerful countries, which want control over others, have not delayed describing such destructive elements as their enemy when their imperialistic interests are served. Here, the economic and

6. This might be an issue of long debate. However, truth lies in the fact that all these are reality and not generated automatically. And, “All reality is a historical process” (George Hegel).

political profit equation is the critical determinant. Where and how imperialism will play its role will depend on their political-economic equation with their self-interest—where, in the ultimate analysis, economic considerations play a pivotal role. Capital will not hesitate to risk its life if there is a chance of getting 300 per cent profit. Therefore, the rise of the *political economy of fundamentalism and associated extremism* is evident. Such religious extremism is compatible with the evolution of the free-market-mediated increasing alienation and crisis in identity. Likewise, suppose a particular form of fundamentalism turns out to be an obstacle to the growth of imperialism. In that case, the same will be replaced by another form of fundamentalism or communalism—this is also noticeable. In the present era, the political economy of oil and gas, geo-economics of water, the economics of war, the economics of ownership and command over space, the political economy of establishing command over the global market—these are some of the broad causal areas of bondages between religious fundamentalism-based extremism and imperialism.

Both external and internal elements of fundamentalism give rise to parochialism against religious liberalism. On the one hand, *the crisis of dollar economics*, the sharp growth of the petro-dollar in the world economy and its volatility, the attack of the Soviet Union on Afghanistan, the barbarian 9/11, and subsequent over-reaction in the name of “War on Terror”, doubt and mistrust in the people carrying the Muslim identity in the developed world, the *war against Iraq*—the second largest reservoir of oil in the world and occupation of the country, the invasion in Libya and Syria, the spread of alien culture through the electronic media in the name of globalisation, and on the other hand, large scale distress-destitution-deprivation of our people amidst politico-economic criminalisation and increasing helplessness of the ordinary person in daily life—all these created a space for and played an immense role in the spread of intolerance and hatred using religion. These were the key opportunities that have created the increasing demand for the exponential growth of religion-based communal politics and associated extremism. The consequent emergence of the *political economy of religious fundamentalism* can be seen as a supply-side response to that demand. Furthermore, supply creates its own demand.

Here, before proceeding further to understand the political-economic essence of the linkages between religious fundamentalism and imperialism (or, more correctly, the epicentre imperialism, that is the United States of America), it would be pertinent to present a brief analysis of two things mentioned above: “*Crisis of dollar economics*”, and playing ‘*War*’ (“War against Iraq”). The *crisis of dollar economics* has many dimensions. Dollarization of the economy has led Latin America, South-East Asia, and many developing countries of South Asia to crises (Stiglitz 2002). In

this regard, a special mention may be made that the United States is the most potent but highly indebted country globally (US budget deficit is equivalent to 6% of her GDP). Imports of the United States are a few times larger than its exports. To make up the gap, the US economy has to depend to a large extent on foreign lenders. The current account deficit of the United States is on average USD 500 billion a year. In this process, the cumulative indebtedness of the USA stands at USD 2 trillion at present, which is equivalent to 20 per cent of their GDP. At present, the US economy has to repay on average USD 200 billion with a 3 per cent per annum rate. If indebtedness continues at the present rate, the amount of debt of the USA in 2020 will be equivalent to 70 per cent of its GDP.

Without new taxes imposed on US citizens and/or without capturing others' wealth, the budget deficit of the USA will go on increasing. The situation in the USA aggravates further due to rising inequality "with the wealthiest 1 per cent owning more than a third of the nation's wealth" (Stiglitz 2013). Therefore, the US economy has no alternative but to grab the wealth of others – the other nations, the nations who are weak. Moreover, the US economy falls into the rank of "global rent seeker". This global rent-seeking by US imperialism is being accomplished using their "Grand Strategy" emanated from the "Monroe Doctrine" (of 1823), the Thucydides principle of "Might is Right" and the "Rotten Apple Theory" (for details, see Chomsky 1967, 2004, 2005, 2008; Herring 2008; Kaplan 2011). The US imperialism's global hegemony in a unipolar world is evident in their uncompromising quest for establishing absolute ownership and absolute control over four global resources, namely (1) land, (2) water resources, (3) energy, fuel, and mineral resources, and (3) space resources aiming at the militarisation of space. This "grand strategy" of US imperialism aiming at establishing absolute global hegemony considers anything and anybody against the strategy as "rotten apple" which might infect "good apples" (who are subservient of US imperialism), and, therefore, be destroyed without delay.

The next issue to understand causal links between imperialism and the rise of fundamentalism (religious and other forms) is the issue of '*imperialistic war*' aimed at the unhindered materialisation of US Imperialism's Grand Strategy of global hegemony. Moreover, such war is beyond even 'preventive war' – it is 'pre-emptive war' (embodied in Bush's doctrine of "pre-emptive strike against suspected threats"). In most cases, imperialism's 'War' is a profitable business. In addition, the target of any preventive war launched by US imperialism must have several characteristics: (1) It (the country) must be virtually defenceless, (2) It must be significant enough to be worth the trouble, (3) There must be a way to portray it as the ultimate evil and an imminent threat to their (USA) survival. Moreover, Saddam Husain's Iraq qualified on all counts (see Chomsky 2008, in

Arrove, Ed.). It is to note that the USA spends more on military expenditure (USD 410 billion per year) than the rest of the world combined. Economist Nordhaus may do a rigorous exercise and say that the USA may lose the USD 200 billion to USD 3,000 billion in the Iraq war. This loss is not an actual loss.

Noble Laureate Milton Friedman has put up a long list and stated that the war would benefit the world and boom the world economy. Lots of armaments are being sold. The business for the reconstruction of post-war Iraq has received momentum. Generally, after a major war, business on arms and ammunition goes on robustly in the Third World. It is also taking place, and if nowhere else, this occurs in countries with monarchs and kings in “good autocratic country.” It is worth keeping in mind that most imperialist countries are energy-dependent, and the energy security of those countries constitutes a key determinant of long-run development. The best routes of oil geography are the oil of Central Asia, Afghanistan’s oil route, and Iraq’s oil. “War for Oil” is central to the US strategy in Iraq. Iraq has the second-largest oil reserves globally, and Iraqi oil is very quickly accessible and cheap. As maintained by Noam Chomsky, “If you control Iraq, you are in a powerful position to determine the price and production levels (not too high, not too low) to undermine OPEC and to throw your weight around throughout the world. It has nothing, in particular, to do with *access* to the oil for import into the United States. It is about controlling the oil, which the United States wants to control” (Chomsky 2005). In addition to the grabbing of Iraq’s oil, there are two others no less important reasons for US imperialism to invade Iraq: (1) the sole drinking water sources of the Middle East are the two rivers Tigris and Euphrates – both originated in Iraq, and (2) the monarchs surrounding Iraq were to taught lessons for the future. Moreover, the lesson is, in short, the US Symington Solution: “*We offer them peace on our terms, and if they refuse – the victory of the graveyard.*”

About five years ago, I wrote to Noam Chomsky (my email to him on 24 July 2016) titled “Political Economy of IS and beyond: Nine days in June-July 2016”. It was about the emerging “China Factor” and the possible changes in the policies and strategies of U.S. imperialism and the relevant probable changes, including the fate of religious extremism. Due to its relevance, let me reproduce that:

“This write-up is neither an article nor an excerpt from any source; this is just my thoughts about the subject; an analysis of causal links “behind 9-days in June-July 2016”. People in academia are over-busy writing tons of pages; those in media spend millions of hours wasting time. The 9-days are from 27th June to 5th July 2016, i.e., the last few days before and after the Muslim’s most important religious holiday and festival—Eid-ul-Fitr. These 9-days were days of extreme turmoil and shocks for most Muslim-populated countries in Asia. What

happened? Who implemented? Who planned? What are the causes behind it? Are these isolated events or linked with something more significant? Things that happened in those 9 days — done by Islamist militants as claimed by them— with visible outcomes are as follows: Suicide bombing in Mukalla City/ Yemen that killed 38 innocent people including women and children (June 27); Bombing in Ataturk airport/ Turkey that killed 45 people (June 28); Grenade attack in a night club of Puchong city/ Kualalumpur that wounded 8 persons (June 28); Stabbed-to-death in a Dhaka/ restaurant that killed 22 persons including 18 foreigners from Italy, Japan, USA, and India (July 01); Grenade attack on a powerful tribal chief in Jalalabad/ Afghanistan (July 02); Midnight car bomb blast in a busy market in Baghdad/ Iraq that killed 308 people and hundreds wounded (July 03); Bomb blast outside a mosque in Patani city / Southern Thailand that killed 1 person with 30 wounded (July 03); Suicide bomb attacks in 3 different places in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (July 4); Suicide bomb attack in a police station in Solo city/ Indonesia, in which the attacker died (July 05).

The questions are—Why here in Asia and who are behind and why? The critical elements of my central argument are: these are not isolated events; these are interrelated and planned; the event executors and the planners are not the same entities (planners have remote controls); they may even represent or hold different interests (planners are good in convincing the executors that they are with them and then at a suitable time kill the executors). The planners' key aim is to ensure and sustain their interest in absolute dominance (hegemony) over the global resources (including trade, water, oil, minerals, space, and whatever natural endowment is available) in a rent-seeking manner (i.e., plundering wealth available or created by others without creating wealth by themselves) or, in other words, destroying the Real Global Wealth. They give a dam to Rousseau: "You are undone if you once forget that the fruits of the Earth belong to us all and the earth itself to nobody." It is; therefore, one should search the source of planning in the very nature and aim of the hegemony of imperialist ambitions of the super-duper power—the U.S. imperialism operating through her competent and relevant agents—the CIA and their subordinates, the pentagons-sexagons (World Bank, IMF, WTO, NATO, UN, and various proxies such as EU and the even UK with Brexit). If and whenever needed, they will create and procreate all necessary new entities by the name of 'Peace', and even try to convince the rest of the world that— "We are bombing you to ensure eternal peace for you" (these are US imperialisms words for Vietnam). The plain truth is that U.S. imperialism has created Taleban, al-Qaeda, bin-Laden, Molla Omar, IS. Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar have no other alternative than to fund through petrodollar and cheap oil (any disobedience costs exceptionally high). So, in essence, all these have nothing to

do with Religion: religion is just a mask or a matter of practical (and historical) convenience or coincidence.

In order to understand the actual causal links, one has to understand the essence of International Political Economy (which in the first appearance may seem disjointed). One has to understand George Hegel, “All reality is a historical process”. The centre of gravity of the global power system is shifting, which is not the first time in human history. It is shifting geographically from the U.S. and Europe to Asia, where China is the rising-most power (therefore, Muslims of Uighur area of Schingian province are recruited by IS) and the border Russia is re-emerging (therefore CIA-IS has recruited the “star boy” militant Muslim Tarkhan Batiarashivilli and Axmed Chatianov and they became top war masters).

The ‘China Factor’ must be a true interest-of-fear and a real cause for U.S. imperialism headaches. The practical, specific reasons for such, among others, are caused by the following development in the last 15 years. In a brief period of the last 15 years- between 2000 and 2015- China has already emerged as a power challenging US imperialism. It is attributed to the following:

1. From the world’s 6th largest to second-largest economic power (but inequality is rising!).
2. In EastAsia, the US trade share has declined from 19.5% to 9.5%, and China increased from 10.2% to 20%.
3. the South China Sea is the route for one-third of the global sea trade, which China controls.
4. Malakka channel—located between Indonesia and Malaysia— is the route for 80% oil import by China.
5. China is heading towards the construction of a rail route: Singapore-Malaysia-Thailand-Laos-Myanmar-China, which aims to open a direct seaport of China with Singapore, Thailand, and Malaysia. China constructed a seaport in Arab-sea in Gwadar/Baluchistan to open oil and pipeline routes. China is constructing road and rail links from South China to Bangladesh and Myanmar, similar to the Persian and Arab Sea via Afghanistan-Iran. These are a big headache for U.S. imperialism and their allies in the west and European allies (actually, they are pseudo or quasi-allies)! Moreover, therefore, in all likelihood, no doubt, the future is going to be very bleak for the U.S. and turmoil-bound for all of us with emergence and re-emergence of many ‘fighters’, ‘proxy fighters’—IS (as non-state actors), SsIS (state-sponsored IS), HS (Hindu States), BS (the Buddhist States in China and East-Asia), CS (Christian States). So I think this whole China factor, accompanied by a geographic shift of power base around Indian and Pacific Oceans, prompted the U.S.

imperialism to create the response mechanism for ‘proxy war’ and ‘asymmetric war’ with the ‘Pivot-to-Asia’ policy and the CS21R strategy. Deploying the ‘Pivot-to-Asia’ policy and the ‘CS21R’ strategy, the U.S. will prepare for Air-Sea Battle with China by deploying 60% of its naval strength in this region by using all means, including religion. Soon, these will be responsible for wiping out of many Muslim Kingdom (e.g., KSA) and at the same time formation of New-Muslim Kingdoms (e.g., Uighur in China, or South of Thailand); many of the relatively secular-spirited Muslim-populated states may turn in to ‘Islamic States’. In other words, maybe ‘Sociocide’ will replace ‘Genocide’ under new forms of proxy war and new equations of Game Rule using modern Thucydides Principle.

However, not everything is linear and Newtonian—“History does not crawl, it jumps.” Then what will happen, if

1. Some of the secular societies in Asia become more secular under “good” leadership?
2. A sort of consolidation and solidarity emerges among people—globally (“global united force against injustice”)?
3. In some countries (in Africa and/or Latin America), progressive forces hold power in government, and they unite against imperialism?
4. Finally, at one point, did China and Russia join hands against dominant imperial power?

Then, US imperialism will be forced to withdraw or change the “Pivot-to-Asia” policy, which, of course, they will do. They have done that before, many a time, but the basic principle always remained the same—a happy marriage of the extension of Monroe doctrine with Thucydides principle (of might is right). Then What!” (Barkat 2016c).

Therefore, my critical conclusions towards the framing of Political Economy of Religious Fundamentalism (one may argue this as “postulate” or “hypothesis,” which will not change the essence of the conclusion) would be as follows: the contemporary world (especially after the fall of socialism in the Soviet Union) is essentially a unipolar one guided by the U.S. dominated Unitarian system of imperialist order, which subordinates all internal factors (and causes). It leads to a sort of global structure where external and internal forces (and/or causes and/or factors) form a single cause-form with two apparent differences; internal forces are subjugated to the prime external force – the U.S. Imperial Ambition aiming at establishing absolute ownership and control over four key-strategic resources of the globe, namely (1) land, (2) water, (3) energy-fuel-minerals, and (4) space.

5. Islam in Bangladesh: Transformation from Liberal to Political Islam

Now that the stage is set to understand the linkages between the essence of contemporary global politics and religious fundamentalist-extremism, it would be logical to proceed towards understanding the evolution of religion – from “religion” *per se* to “political religion” in East Bengal (now Bangladesh). The fact is that most of the written histories about the evolution of Islam in East Bengal are incomplete and euphemistic. They are not based on empirical evidence and lack knowledge-based inferences. Objective analyses of the materials of historiography, such as geography, changes of river morphology, the emergence and evolution of agrarian civilisation, changing pattern of land revenue collection, historical chronology, politics of the Hindu Raja and that of the Muslim emperors—have not been made in understanding the essence of the evolution of Islam in East Bengal. The relevant historiography is relatively weak and lacks objectivity.

In the writings of historians, the origin and evolution of Islam in East Bengal are available in four lines of the historiography of Islamisation in East Bengal—*Immigration, Sword, Patronage, and Social Liberation*. None of these historiographic lines is complete in terms of empirical substantiation. The pertinent issues without satisfactory answers include: Who are the immigrants? When and how did the immigrants arrive? How was Islam transformed into a mass religion with the sword’s power in this country? History tells us that even the most conservative Mogul emperor, Aurangzeb (1658-1707), did not encourage or exert pressure for religious purposes. Akbar (1556-1605) abolished the discriminatory land revenue system, banned activities offensive to the Hindus, for example, cow slaughter, admitted Hindu sages into his private audience and Rajput chieftains into his ruling class. He ordered that the holy book of the Hindus should be translated into Persian and celebrated Hindu festivals.

There is an inverse relationship between the degree of Muslim political penetration and Islamisation in the subcontinent. Dhaka was the residence of the Nawab for about a hundred years, but it contained a smaller proportion of Muslims than any of the surrounding districts, except Faridpur. Malda and Murshidabad contained the old capitals, the centre of Muslim rule for about 450 years. Nevertheless, the Muslims formed a smaller population in Dinajpur, Rajshahi, and Nadia (The Census of India 1901; Beverly 1872).

The main initiators of Islam in East Bengal—the Sufis-Devotees-Ulamaas—did not preach extreme religious rites during their time in the last many centuries. They even did not support any religious persecution. On the other hand, they kept the place of religious activity—Tomb, Mosque, Madrasa, Shrines—small in size. They cleared the forest and expanded the areas for agricultural activity in the

once-forest hinterland. They got this hinterland forest as a grant. It implies that they involved people in economic activities, primarily in agriculture. Side by side, Sufis emphasized activities related to rendering humane services. They never persuaded the people much to accept Islam. Their main motto was “service to the best of the creations,” that is, ‘service to the human person (*Ashraful Maklukath*) is religion.’ There is no evidence indicating that the Sufis in Bengal indulged in destroying temples or places of worship of other religions (Rizvi 1978).

The Sufis and their contemporary religious persons combined religious ideas with economic development and agricultural production. From the writings of the Sufis and Devotees, such evidence is there that “*Allah sent Adam to Sandip Island. At the instruction of Allah, Gabriel asked Adam to go to Mecca to build the original Kaba. After the Kaba was built, Gabriel gave him a plough and a yoke, a pair of draft bullocks, and some grains and communicated the instruction of Allah: ‘agriculture will be your destiny.’ Adam sowed the grains, raised crops, harvested and prepared bread with the corns*”⁷.

Therefore, in contradistinction with the central theses of most historiographers, we see no significant role of the Sword, Immigration, or Patronage in the propagation of Islam in East Bengal. Islam evolved in East Bengal as an adjunct of agriculture-based civilisation. Sufis and Devotees of Islam, along with preachers of other religions, participated in the struggle against feudalism and colonialism. They even gave leadership to such a movement. The Sufis and Ulamaas took such steps using the usual logic of liberal humanism of religion.

For the first time in the history of Islam in East Bengal, a major regressive trend was evident in the last century, which can be treated as a disaster in the socio-political life in Bengal. In anti-colonial movements, a move was launched to establish a State – based on religion, thereby creating Pakistan for the Muslims and Hindustan for the Hindus. This widely-known “two-nation theory” can be denoted as the first formal basis for forming ‘Political Islam’ in Bengal.

The Sufis and Ulamaas of the liberal humanism of Islam could not oppose the division of United India based on religion. This regressive transformation against the main religious course did not occur suddenly. Specific aggressive courses of religion (such as Wahabi) were in place. As a result, a negative transformation of the humanistic welfarism of the Sufi’s and Ulamaa’s Islam occurred. What was liberal, humanistic and secular turned into parochial aggressiveness. The object was to capture state power using “political Islam” in narrow selfish interest. With

7. *The Rise of Islam and Bengal Frontier—1206 to 1760* by Richard Eaton quoted from Saiyid Sultan’s epic poem “*Nabi Bangsa*”.

the establishment of the Pakistan State based on religion, a new trend was set. The trend of capturing state power through aggressive religious fundamentalism arose from a peaceful economic evolution-based agrarian development. Religious communalism became so powerful in Pakistan that in the 1965 Indo-Pak war, the feudal-army rulers did not take even twenty-four hours to level all the Hindus of East Pakistan into Hindustani. They proclaimed the ‘Enemy Property Act’, implying that all the Hindus residing in Pakistan are enemies.⁸

Such religion-based communalism supported by the state was never in evidence in the history of East Bengal.

The religion-based division of the country took place without the people’s informed consent (irrespective of Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, or Christian). They were not involved in the country’s division process (the so-called referendum was just a tokenism). The people’s opinion was not respected. That is why at that time, there was a bluffing slogan: “*Biri* (or *Bidi* —a locally made cigarette) in hand, beetle nut in the mouth, we will establish Pakistan through the fight.”⁹ On the other hand, people with vision declared: “This independence is a blunt lie because millions are hungry.”¹⁰

The country was divided based on religion (no one felt the need to seek the opinion of the mass of people). Due to the preponderance of the people of one religion in conducting state affairs, feudalistic Pakistan took the aggressive religious form. In India, the situation was not that acute because, in a relatively large country like India, the confluence of various religions and the politico-economic evolution of equality and equity were given constitutional recognition from the very beginning. In addition, both democracy and the media have played a critical role.

During the whole period of Pakistan (1947 to 1971), religion-based communalism was utilised in conducting state affairs and socio-cultural activities. For overcoming any socio-political – crisis, religion has always been used as a pretext. They would say, ‘Islam in danger’ wherever there was any problem. “Islam in danger” was the only slogan for maintaining military rule and autocracy. Finally, this same slogan was used against our liberation war in 1971. The slogan “Islam in danger” (*Islam khatre mein hai*) was used when the Punjabi, Sindhi,

8. Because of enactment of this inhuman communal Act in 1965 and its *de facto* continuation till today (as “Vested Property Act”) about six million people belonging to the Hindu community have lost 2.6 million acres of land property (for details, see Barkat, Abul. et al., 2008). The real life consequences of this Act are well documented in Barkat, Abul. et al., 2000.

9. “*Hath me biri, mu me pan—Larke lenge Pakistan*”—the causes behind the popularity of this slogan can be traced to the interplay of two factors, namely, about 200 years of colonialism and exploitation of the feudal lords in East Bengal, most of whom were Hindus.

10. “*Yeh Azadi Jhooti Hai, Lakho Insan Bhukha Hai*”.

Baluch Army were brought from West Pakistan to East Pakistan to fight the Freedom Fighters. Of course, many witnessed a different situation in East Pakistan among the Pakistani Army. The same slogan, "Islam in danger," was used in this country while forming the so-called "peace committee." The *Al-Badr*, *Al-Shams*, *Rajakar* were formed with a handful of Bengali Muslim collaborators who were against the liberation of this country. These war criminals were confident that the Bengalis, imbued with the ideas of the liberation war, would be defeated by the joint effort of the powerful Pakistan military and these local collaborators — *Rajakar*, *Al-Badr*, *Al-Shams*. However, the opposite happened. At the price of colossal blood, we earned our independence. However, we failed to punish the war criminals who opposed our liberation war. It played a decisive role in bolstering their audacity. Those *religious traders* and a handful of their followers represent extreme religious communalism and the *economics of fundamentalism* in Bangladesh. In this country, this was a significant distortion of religion and may be termed the second phase of the regressive transformation of Islam in East Bengal. In this country, the evolution of Islam in its historical perspective (Sufism) is distinctly different from the present-day fundamentalism and their political economy. Therefore, today's religious extremism can be treated as a continuation of the religion-based act of terrorism of 1971 on a larger scale with a deeper base. This regressive transformation got impetus and crystallised with the legitimisation of communalism in the Constitution when 'secularism' was replaced by "Islam will be the State Religion" (Constitution of the People's republic of Bangladesh, Article 2A, Eighth Amendment).

Communalism in Pakistan worked as a basis for forming the State, which gained strength in a big way afterwards. For freeing the people from discrimination of two economies, the independence of Bangladesh was declared in 1971. The people of this country dreamt of a welfare state, where freedom of choice would prevail, where economic opportunities would be open to all, where social facilities would be evolved, where political freedom would be available, where there would be transparency and protective security, where there would be a non-communal environment and where secularism would evolve as a state principle. The Constitution of the independent Bangladesh State makes such promises publicly. Such a state also meets the demand for the fundamental rights of equality of men and women, irrespective of religion and caste. In the real sense, however, the difference between the promise and reality was so stark that the possibility existed for the spread of the *economics of fundamentalism* and the related politics of religious extremism.

6. Economic Power Base of Islamic Fundamentalism in Bangladesh: Issues on Foundation

The foundation of the *economics of fundamentalism*, or, in other words, the economic power base of the Islamist fundamentalists and extremists, is not weak in Bangladesh. Although the feudal relationship of production has formally come to an end in the Bangladesh economy, the traditional feudal psychology coupled with deep-rooted patriarchy has not been abolished on the one hand, and the capitalist relations of production have not yet evolved on the other. The worse form of capital of various types has evolved, which was not conducive to productive investment. This worse form of *vulture capitalism* is more conducive to producing “*brief case capitalism*” (commission agency) than a strongly-based home-grown industrial capitalism. This capitalism is more interested in “real estate and mall-centric economy” than in “productive industrial-agriculture-centric economy”. Therefore, from the structural point of view, the system is not conducive to the accelerated generation of employment in a labour surplus economy, thereby not conducive to poverty and inequality reduction.¹¹

Also, such a free-market economy is neither free nor poor-friendly. The so-called free market within globalised monopoly capitalism has not been instrumental in developing national capitalism in Bangladesh. On the contrary, it hindered that and fuelled the rise of communal politics and Islamic extremism in Bangladesh.

From the point of view of structural transformation, during the last 40 years (1975-2015) of independence, there has not been any fundamental progressive ‘pro-poor’ change in the economy of Bangladesh. It cannot be said that the spirit of the human welfare of independence has been realised. The critical spirit of independence was to develop an exploitation-free equitable economy, institute a secular mindset among people and establish an enlightened society imbued with

11. The economic idea about *poverty* is mostly a narrowly defined one indicating income poverty or food poverty (measured in terms of direct calorie intake or cost of basic needs only). Poverty, which creates space for fundamentalism, should be viewed in a broader sense as a complex interrelated domain of the following: income poverty, food poverty, poverty due to low wage, poverty due to unemployment, poverty due to lack of shelter, poverty due to lack of access to public resources including rights to khas land, poverty due to in access to public education, poverty due to ill-health, poverty mediated through environmental hazards, political poverty (due to lack of political freedom), poverty due to lack of transparency guarantee, poverty due to lack of protective security, poverty mediated through various forms of marginalisation (for example, among religious minorities, schedule caste people, indigenous peoples, poor women, women in female-headed households, women who are widowed and/or separated, slum dwellers, floating people, char people, rickshaw-van pullers, workers of informal sectors, people in low-end low-wage occupation, households with child labour, disabled poor, etc.), and poverty of mind-set (for details, see Barkat. A. 2006b, 2016d).

the spirit of liberation, i.e., ensure whole space for 'real development.' The gap between people's aspirations and reality has been vast and is ever increasing. This widening gap between aspiration and reality has also helped generate and nourish religious fundamentalism in Bangladesh.

Independent Bangladesh has emerged as an outcome of the struggle against discrimination in the two economies. However, the trend of evolution of the last 40 years shows a clear division of the country of 160 million into two parts: in the first part are the powerful people of small groups, and their number is no more than one million (including family members); in the second part are the large numbers of people who are powerless and whose number will be 159 million. Due to the machination of politics and economics, a situation has been created where 159 million powerless people exist against only one million powerful people. These 159 million people are helpless, deprived, destitute, and distressed. In the real sense, there was no conscious socio-political effort from the governance quarters to make these large numbers of powerless people into powerful ones or empower them by including the excluded. On the contrary, multi-faceted efforts increase the power of the powerful people in society.

Undoubtedly, most of the powerless people in Bangladesh—whatever is reflected in the "statistical economy"—led their lives in extreme suffering and misery. The relative share of the poor people in the total national household income is declining, and that of the rich is increasing, and this means – inequality is rising. In parallel, a self-destructing *culture of plundering* and a *culture of secrecy* (opposite of transparency) have struck deep and strong roots in the economy, politics, administration, education, and culture. Black money, violence, illegal arms, muscle power, illegal gratification, kickback, speed money, corruption, maladministration, oppression-repression are the determinants of the *culture of plundering*. All these contribute to the rise of the *economics of fundamentalism* and the consolidation of religion-based politics ('*Political Islam*') in Bangladesh.

The basic tendency in the socio-economic evolution during the last 40 years depicts that one million criminals have trapped 159 million helpless people in the framework of institutionalised criminalisation. These two trends are evident in Bangladesh: a powerful criminal minority and a powerless majority (the victims of criminalisation). The rise and growth of Islamist fundamentalism and associated militancy during the last 40 years depict a scenario that clarifies that whatever is against human welfare and human development is rising.

During the last 40 years, economic criminalisation has acted as a powerful catalyst to criminalise all spheres of politics and society. We have attained a situation of perpetuating the exclusion of the excluded; an environment aggravating the process

of alienation of the excluded; a scenario which has created conditions for more active denial to address the issues on the broadening of human choices for full-life (to ensure five types of freedom the people shall enjoy). The developmental balance sheet vividly shows that we are now caught in a trap of the culture of plundering wherein the overall environment favours everything against human development, which is entirely in congruence with the interest of criminalisation. The last forty years' socio-economic developmental balance sheet of Bangladesh depicts a clear tendency: the status of all indicators conducive to human development is getting worse, and indicators associated with the criminalisation trap are getting more robust, thereby limiting the scope for broadening human choices to exercise their own free will. During the past four decades of our development, we are again back to the discriminatory two-economy (with added strength): one economy is represented by only one million most powerful people (in the steering wheel, irrespective of who holds the formal power), and the unempowered majority represents the other economy, 159 million people—the excluded, deprived and distressed (Barkat 2003, 2004a, 2016d). This highly uneven and grossly inequitable development pattern has taken place when Article 7 of our Constitution stipulates, "*All powers in the Republic belong to the People*".

The analysis of the type of development that Bangladesh passed through in the last forty years makes it clear that some people became owners of unlimited wealth not by creating wealth but by way of taking wealth away from others (became rent-seekers) and a more extensive section of the people have become poorer and pauper. Grabbing resources and increasing unearned income at a high rate, pomp and show have gone up, and the sufferings of various kinds of the more extensive section of the people have expanded. Multistoried buildings have been erected, but side by side, the number of slums has gone up; the government's actual allocations for the welfare of the people have declined, and side by side unproductive expenditures have gone up; donor interferences have increased, and simultaneously local initiatives have decreased, and the government allocations have gone up in the unproductive sector. The distance between the public and public servants has increased. Election expenditure has gone up, but good governance and the efficacy of elected institutions have gone down; the power of black money has gone up, the politicians' respect for people has gone down, and discrimination between the rich and poor has increased. The government's actual allocation in basic education has gone down. Poverty-related diseases have increased, the actual expenditure on people's health has gone down, and the efficacy of the government's health sector has eroded. Trading on religion increased – the number of *Pirs*, *Fakirs*, astrologers, fortune-tellers, violence in the name of religion—has gone up, and love for the people of different religions has

declined. The culture of rationality and science, secular behaviour, and enlightened mindset has been severely damaged. In other words, cultural communalism has deepened.

More so, communalism in education has increased the strength of the economic power of fundamentalism. Every third student in Bangladesh is a Madrassa student numbering 8 million; 73 per cent of all Madrassas (55,000) are Quomi Madrassa (a large part is breeding ground of religious fundamentalism); annual expenditures of Madrassas would amount to USD 175 million; 75 per cent of the Madrassa graduates become unemployed; most Madrassa students are from poor or lower-middle-class families (Barkat et al. 2011). During the last 40 years, the number of mainstream primary schools has doubled, but the number of Dakhil Madrasas (religious schools) has increased eight times. Over the same time, enrolment in primary schools has doubled, but those in Dakhil Madrasas increased thirteen times; public expenditure per student of government middle class educational institutions is Tk. 3,000 as against Tk. 5,000 in the Madrassa sector. Therefore, the “intellectual” basis for the rise of religious extremism is in full swing.

In terms of changes in the composition of Islamist extremism’s intellectual basis, a severe cause of concern needs to be noted. A widely held perception was always there that most extremists are related to religious – Madrassa education, and it is not even the complete picture. A closer look at the actual situation on the ground reveals that the extremists, in most cases, those arrested belonged to JMB and HUJI-B, with the background of Madrassa education. However, those arrested representing Ansarullah Bangla Team (ABT) and Hijbut Tahrir, who killed the progressive bloggers, were from the mainstream education system (not Madrassa). Many of the latter were held from well-off families. While it is difficult to ascertain the relative composition of the educational system background of the Islamist extremist caught by the law enforcement agencies, it could be safely concluded that 50 per cent are from Madrassa background and 50 per cent from general education (non-Madrassa). However, although this indicates that a large part of the Islamist extremists belongs to the non-Madrassa background, it is not easy to draw any firm conclusion about the actual share by educational and economic background. It is simply because we do not know the actual total number of Islamist extremists by their education-system related and economic-status related background. However, one critical thing of our education system, irrespective of religious and non-religious (or the so-called secular), is that it produces “hopeless and frustrated graduates”. Because it does not value basic philosophy, history, and nature-related disciplines in its curricula, therefore, it is a serious issue to ponder upon in our future education planning.

The development pattern mediated through economic and political

criminalisation and the anti-poor, anti-middle class political economy has transformed the socio-economic class structure in rural and urban Bangladesh. This changing class structure is highly compatible with the rise of religious extremism and the *political economy of fundamentalism*. The nature of such transformation of the socio-economic class structure in Bangladesh indicates an overall deteriorating situation of the poor and middle class and the concentration of assets and power in a few belonging to the wealthy class. The dynamics of socio-economic classes in Bangladesh during the past 30 years (1984-2014) bears ample testimony about the formation of wealthy class a few in number and overall fall in the status of poor and marginalized – the predominant majority of people. The following features reflecting the trends in socio-economic class structure, which explain the real reason(s) for the rise of religious extremism and the *economics of fundamentalism*, are in order:

1. In 2014, out of 160 million people in Bangladesh, 66 per cent were poor, 31.3 per cent represented the middle class, and the rest 2.7 per cent were rich. In just about 30 years, between 1984 and 2014, the number of poor people has increased by 45.5 million, from 60 million in 1984 to 105.5 million in 2014. The actual inequality has increased manifold. This rising number of poor and increasing inequality—an outcome of failure in national development—constitutes a solid basis towards religiosity and the formation and rise of religious extremism in Bangladesh.
2. The poor are disproportionately highly concentrated in the rural areas compared to the urban: 82 per cent of the poor live in the rural and 18 per cent in the urban areas. Among the rural households, 60 per cent are landless, 60 per cent do not have access to electricity in the households (one should realise that electricity is not just light; it is also enlightenment),¹² and 65 per cent do not have access to the public health system; urbanisation in Bangladesh is basically “slumization” or “ruralisation of urban life” without concomitant industrialisation but with the growing informal economy.¹³ This nature of poverty in both rural and urban areas forms a fertile ground for the growth of religious extremism and associated activities.
3. During the last 30 years (1984-2014), the total population has increased by

¹². For details about impact of electricity on rural poverty, see Barkat, Abul (2005b). “Bangladesh Rural Electrification Programme: A Success Story of Poverty Reduction through Electricity”.

¹³. For details about “not urbanisation *per se* but slumization”, see Barkat, Abul and S. Akhter (2001). “Mushrooming Population: The Threat of Slumization Instead of Urbanisation in Bangladesh”; Barkat, Abul (2016d). “Causes, Consequences and Transformational Possibilities of Poverty-Disparity-Inequality in Bangladesh: In Search of a Unified Political Economy Theory”.

60 per cent, but it has increased by about 76 per cent among the population in the 'poor' category. Therefore, it is most likely that the growth in poverty-led fundamentalism has been high.

4. Among the current 50.1 million middle-class populations, 27.1 million (54% of the entire middle class) are in the lower middle class, 15.6 million (31% of the middle class) are in the mid-middle class, and the rest, 7.5 million (15% of the middle class) are in the upper-middle class. This middle class – especially the unstable lower and mid-middle classes (combined constituting 27% of the total population and 70% of the total middle-class population) – forms the intellectual drivers of fundamentalism and the key to the 'success' of militant religious activities (for details, see Barkat 2015a, 2015b, 2016c, 2016d, 2017d).

In brief, the following dimensions of class dynamics showing rising inequality are worth analysis:

- a. During the last 30 years (between 1984 and 2014), the absolute size of the population has increased by 60 million. Which class contributed how much to this incremental 60 million people? Estimates show that 76 per cent of the total incremental population can be attributed to the incremental population in the 'poor' category, 14 per cent due to the downward shift of the past-lower-middle class, and about 5 per cent due to downward shift of the mid-middle class.
- b. Middle-class people are relatively more concentrated in the urban areas (45% of the total urban population) than rural (27% of the total rural population). However, about 66 per cent of all middle-class population lives in the rural areas (of whom about 59% represent lower middle class having regular tendency to join the rank of poor).
- c. During the last 30 years (1984-2012), the population size in the middle class has increased by 13.6 million (from 36.5 million in 1984 to 50.1 million in 2012). Sixty percent of this increment in the middle class has been due to the increase in the size of the lower middle class, implying lower middle class (in most cases) could not go up as well as there has been a downward shift from mid-middle class to lower middle class.
- d. During the last 30 years, while the size of the population in the entire middle class has increased by 37 per cent, the lower middle class has increased by 43 per cent when a large number of the lower middle class has gone down to join the poor.
- e. The population size in the rich (upper class) category is 4.4 million (in 2014). During the last 30 years, there has been an addition of 1.1 million people in the rich category – an increase of 33 per cent between

1984 and 2014 (with a low base of 3.3 million in 1984). More importantly, the relative share of the rich category in the total population has decreased from 3.3 per cent in 1984 to 2.7 per cent in 2014. Furthermore, based on studies on economic criminalization and the black economy, it can be argued that within the “rich class”, a minority group has been created who are super-duper rich or, in other words, there may be 20 per cent among “rich” who commands over 80 per cent of the total wealth of “rich class.” All the abovestated imply that the Bangladesh economy and society with the rent-seeking dominated structure has taken the shape of “For the 1%, of the 1%, by the 1%”. Such a structure perpetuates rising poverty and inequality and creates and procreates the most congenial fertile ground for rising religious fundamentalism and associated militancy (for details, see Barkat 2016d, 2017b, 2018).

Therefore the balance of dynamics of the socio-economic class structure in Bangladesh depicts that, during the last thirty years, the overall inequality situation has worsened: the middle class has shown a downward tendency with extended reproduction of the poor from the lower middle class, and reproduction of the lower middle class from the mid-middle class; and wealth has been accumulated in the hands of a few rich (2.7% of the total population, but perhaps 80% of their wealth being in the hands of 20% of them constituting the super-duper rich). The worsening mass poverty and widening of inequality coupled with a declining non-stable middle class and ‘naked’ super-duper richness of a few provide the solid ground in Bangladesh for making the soil most fertile for both production and extended reproduction of religious communalism, fundamentalism, and religious extremism in all spheres of life.

Based on the above analysis, it may be concluded that although historical development over the last few centuries did not indicate communalisation of the economy, the recent past’s anti-human development and anti-human welfare efforts have strengthened the politico-economic basis of religious extremism and nourished all the conditions for strengthening the base for economic fundamentalism. Moreover, all the elements of the so-called national development within the orbit of economic and political criminalisation guided by the rent-seekers who have subjugated both the government and politics and that within the larger canvas of imperialistic global system (guided by the imperialist epicentre—the United States) have accelerated the process.

7. Islamist Fundamentalism in Bangladesh: Magnitude, Mechanisms, Strength, and Sources

In post-liberation Bangladesh, political power favouring people’s welfare has not

evolved. Autocracy or a parliament with the vested interest of black money has repeatedly returned to state power. The economy has been criminalised, which has enhanced the effective demand for the criminalisation of politics. The extent of criminalisation of our economy can be gauged from the following. During the last 40 years (between 1975 and 2014), a total of about USD 32 billion (1 USD = Bd. Tk 78.40) of foreign loans and grants have come to Bangladesh officially. National-international vested interest groups have misappropriated an estimated 75 per cent of these.¹⁴ These people now produce black money equivalent to approximately USD 9 billion (estimated for 2015). Estimates show that the cumulative total amount of black money produced in the country during the last 40 years would be equivalent to USD 100 billion.¹⁵ These same agents of the criminalised economy are involved in money laundering equivalent to about USD 5-7 billion annually. These are the members of organized syndicates responsible for artificial price hikes of essential commodities (food and non-food).¹⁶ They are bank loan defaulters of about USD 10-12 billion. These are the people, many of whom are involved in the illegal trading of drugs and arms of high value. For any government procurement or big tender, they have to be paid at least 20 per cent commission as rent for doing business in “their territory of influence”. These people have unlawfully occupied *khas* (government-owned) land and waterbodies—they are grabbers of around 15 million acres of *khas* land and waterbodies. Some of these people are the owners of commercial shrimp firms (*gher*) and have command over private armed brigades in the coastal belts. It is to be noted that, geographically, these coastal belts are a good breeding ground for religious extremists.

This economic criminalisation has increased the effective demand for political criminalisation. Political criminalisation has many faces: the economic criminals, for their self-interest, grab political processes and influence decision-making institutions to make it impossible to conduct state affairs as per the constitutional norms. They finance concerned organizations and persons of mainstream power politics. They patronise grafts and corruption. They play a critical role in determining state budget allocations and enjoy the same. They grab everything—land, water, and even the court’s verdict. They utilise the coverage

14. For methodological details, see Barkat, Abul (2001). “How Much Foreign Aid Does Bangladesh Really Need: Political Economy of Last Three Decades”.

15. For details, see Barkat, Abul (2005f). “On Price Hike of Essential Commodities and Human Development within the Context of Political Economy of Criminalisation”.

16. For details, See Abul Barkat (2006b). “A Non-Poor’s Thinking about Poverty: Political Economy of Poverty in Bangladesh”.

of the religion wherever needed, and of late, they do anything and everything in the name of religion. They ‘purchase’ seats in the parliament—they know that, depending on circumstances, by investing USD 167 thousand to USD 4.7 million, they can “purchase” a seat in the parliament. In addition, they go on practising the same—in the 1954 parliament, ‘business people’ constituted only 4 per cent, and now they constitute 84 per cent in the parliament. Even the Election Commission does not know what the ‘business’ is. People have no confidence in their hearts in such criminals of politics and economics. As there is no ‘role model’ in politics before the people, such tendencies have created frustrations and hopelessness among the masses. These factors have highly facilitated the creation of a ‘space’ for the spread of religious extremism and ultra-communal fundamentalism.¹⁷

Because of economic and political criminalisation, people have either already lost or are increasingly losing confidence in the so-called democratic politicians. At the same time, the progressive tendencies have either not evolved or are not evolving. When people become steadily endangered, they lose confidence in governing institutions. When lack of confidence becomes the rule, most people increasingly and gradually become dependent on fate. Moreover, this *dependence on fate* is increasing in an agrarian economy, where 60 per cent of the farmers are effectively landless. It should not be forgotten that Islam here in East Bengal has evolved based on agriculture. The politics of Islamic fundamentalism is exploiting this vacuum. People have seen with their own eyes how the communal forces, even in a country like India, where democracy has prevailed for long, initially captured two to three seats in the parliament and finally became successful in capturing state power in 10-15 years. In addition to other instances, these are examples of how the communal forces think their dream of climbing to power in Bangladesh will come into reality. They also know that to make their political power self-reliant, they need stable economic power of their own. Based on this necessity of the “economic power-based political process”, they practise different politico-economic organisational models in different places to capture state power by forming a cadre-based militant party. They call it the “*Jihadi Party*”.

Furthermore, based on the ‘Khomeini experience’ in Iran, they argue for the possibility and necessity of capturing state power. Therefore, in the whole process of transformation of the once humanistic Islam into political Islam, they have successfully assimilated the *mythos* of religion with the *logos* of reality, and under the overall umbrella of an Islamist Political Party (with its many branches including militant activists) pursue economic power-based political processes

17. See for details, Barkat, Abul (2005e). “Criminalisation of Politics in Bangladesh”; Barkat, Abul (2005g). “Right to Development and Human Development: The Case of Bangladesh”.

aimed at capturing state power. Ideologically, they argue that this process is a transformation from ‘Western modernity’ to ‘Islamic modernity’, and they are confident about the success of this process in a country like Bangladesh.

In Bangladesh, fundamentalism experiments the effectiveness of various politico-economic models with the help of cadre-based politics. This politico-economic organisational model of fundamentalism intends to create “an economy within the mainstream economy”, “a government within the government”, and “a state within the state” aimed ultimately at capturing state power. The following twelve constitute the key sectoral elements of the model: (1) financial institutions, (2) educational institutions, (3) pharmaceutical-diagnostic and health-related institutions, (4) religious organisations, (5) trading and commercial establishments, (6) transport and communication-related organisations, (7) real estate, (8) media and IT, (9) local government, (10) NGOs, trusts and foundations, (11) Islamist Militant organizations (such as Ansarullah Bangla Team, *Bangla Bhai or JMB*, *Jama'aetul Mujahideen Bangladesh*, *Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islam-Bangladesh*, *HUJI-B*, and such programme-based organisations)¹⁸, and (12) occupational/ professional activity-based organisations including of farmers and industrial workers. Among these institutions, not all are profit-earning (for example, local government and professional groups). In such cases, cross-subsidies are given, and they earn high profits even in so-called non-profit organisations; for example, the *Bangla Bhai* project, where land revenue and extortion have been instituted.

Even in some areas, high profit is earned in Madrasas, meaning the income is higher than the expenditure at the end of the year. Another good example is the registration of “*Chashi Kalyaan Samity*” (Farmers Welfare Association) —the

¹⁸. These programme-based Islamic fundamentalist organisations are primarily the militant fronts of the mainstream Islamist Party. There are 123 such Islamist militant-extremist groups in Bangladesh (See, Annex 1), the most prominent ones are as follows: *Al-Harat Al-Islamia*, *Allar Dal Brigade*, *Al-Markajul Al-Islami*, *Al-Jihad Bangladesh*, *Ahle-Hadis*, *Al-Kurat*, *Al-Islami Martyrs Brigade*, *Al-Khidmat*, *Amirate-Din-AL-Sayeed Mujahed Bahini*, *Ansarullah Bangladesh Team*, *Al-Tanjeeb*, *Arakan Mujahed Party* (and other groups carrying ‘Arakan’ names), *Harkat-ul Jihad*, *Harkat-ul-Islam Al-Jihad*, *Hijbut Tawheed*, *Hijbut Tahrir*, *Islami Bipplobi Parishad*, *Iktadul-Talah Al-Muslem*, *Jama'aetul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB)*, *Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh (JMJB)*, *Joyishe Mohammad*, *Joyishe Mostafa*, *Jangi Hakikat*, *Jamaeet-ul Falayia*, *Jamaat-e-Yahiya Jummatul Al-Sadaat*, *Sahadat-e-Al-Hikma*, *Shahadat-e-Nobuyot*, *Hezbollah Islami Samaj*, *Hizbul Mahadi*, *Ibtadatul Al-Muslemia*, *Jamiayeete Islami Solidarity Front*, *Rohingya Independence Force* (and other groups carrying ‘Rohingya’ name), *Tahfize Harmayin*, *Khedmate Islam*, *Islahul Muslem*, *Islami Liberation Tiger*, *Ta-Amir Ud-Din*, *Tauheedi Janata* (see Barkat 2013a, 2018). All of these militant groups receive funding and other support from both external sources and domestic economy of fundamentalism.

official peasant wing of the Jamaat-e-Islami—by the NGO Affairs Bureau; this is contradictory to the law of the land, which says that a “Political Party or their affiliates cannot be registered with the NGO Affairs Bureau which permits obtaining foreign fund for political activities.” Earning profit from non-profit organisations is a significant strength of religious politics, which is possible because such politics perfectly exploit people’s psychology of “dependence on fate or destiny.” It can be concluded from one fact (among others) that most *Jihadis* (armed) caught by the police in the last few years (in Bangladesh) have categorically said to the press: “To do armed *jihad*—is my right, and to participate in armed *jihad*—is my responsibility as a Muslim. No one has the right to stop one from doing *Jihad*.”

The above-mentioned organisational models of economic fundamentalism differ significantly from the usual business norms and strategies. Some of the crucial characteristics of conducting the economic model-strategies of fundamentalism are as follows: (1) Each model is run by ideologically motivated experts aiming to attain their supreme political goal: “capture state power.” (2) In each model, multi-faceted management procedures are applied, where the critical policy matters are being decided and controlled by the political leadership. (3) Although there is coordination among various models, mutual identification of the high-level coordinators is kept sufficiently secret (may be regarded as a sort of a strategy of guerrilla warfare). (4) Each model is well-coordinated and well-disciplined (pursuing the policy of military discipline), following the profit spirit of private sector organisations. (5) Whenever a model successfully realises its politico-economic objectives, it is quickly replicated at different strategic places.

Therefore, it can be argued that, in pursuing their economic models, the religious fundamentalists and extremists are politically fully conscious about their crucial aim of capturing state power, and they constantly try to use scientific means and methods for the realisation of the goal in their own way. It also implies that although the theologies and ideologies of fundamentalism are rooted in fear and get impetus due to increasing inequality, these movements are not just an archaic throwback into the past—they are innovative and modernising.¹⁹

Regarding the source of funding, some experts argue that the Islamist religious extremists procure the whole (or most of the) money from abroad for conducting their activities. It may be untrue to a great extent (See Box 1),

¹⁹ Fundamentalism is a child of globalisation, which it both responds to and utilises. Fundamentalist groups everywhere have made extensive use of new communications technologies. Before he came to power in Iran, Ayatollah Khomeini circulated videos and cassettes of his teachings. *Hindutva* militants have made extensive use of the Internet and electronic mail to create a ‘feeling of Hindu identity’ (Giddens 2003).

although they collaborate in trade and commerce with foreign co-ideology investors. Most likely, the significant portion of the donations come from foreign sources to and through the NGOs controlled by them. The hypothesis mentioned above may not be correct to a large extent because religious fundamentalists have already successfully built a solid economic base of their own. It has happened or is happening as follows: they were directly involved in looting the properties of the ordinary people in 1971; the ultra-communal forces, divided into many parties and activist groups, have got substantial financial support from abroad (to conduct their activities) since the mid-1970s; they invested such resources to build relevant socio-politico-economic models.

In most cases, their invested money earns a high profit. They utilise a part of the profit to promote organisational activities.²⁰ A part of the profit is used for the institution's extension, and a part is spent on creating new institutions.

As shown in Table 1, the estimated annual net profit of economic fundamentalism in Bangladesh (in 2015) would be about USD 367 million (Bd. Taka 28.74 billion; US \$ 1 = Bd. Taka 78.40). The highest share of such profit, 27.8 per cent (of the total net profit), comes from financial institutions (banks, insurance companies, leasing companies).²¹

The second highest, 19.4 per cent of the total net profit, comes from NGOs, trusts, and foundations,²² 10.6 per cent comes from trading concerns, 10.0 per cent profit

²⁰. This includes expenditure on account of salary to the political workers, expenditure in connection with conduct of day-to-day political activity, funding huge threat gathering such as by Hefazate-Islam in Dhaka city on 5 May 2013, funding religious functions including "Waaz Mehfiles", running arms training centres (the Foreign Ministry of India has accused that there are 148 arms training centres for the fundamentalists in Bangladesh), killing people who they fear, such as the bloggers etc. This accusation has not been denied formally. Similar accusations have been made by the United States and European Union. The government's position on the existence of such arms training centres in Bangladesh was unclear until August 17, 2005 (that is, until the day of countrywide serial bomb blasts). The government until that period used to say that "JMB and JMJB do not exist, these are creations of the media and political Opposition". However, after the August 17, 2005 incident the government was forced to change its position: from non-recognition to tacit recognition of the existence of militant activities. The print and electronic media have been openly disseminating information about such arms, explosives, relevant leaflets and booklets, training centres with photos of trainers etc.

²¹. The link between the Islamic Bank (the local bank with highest amount of market capitalisation among all local banks) and the religious militant groups has been clearly evident in the fact that because of this link this Bank got the highest punishment under the Money Laundering Act by the State Bank (Bangladesh Bank) in 2006.

²². In Bangladesh there are about 231 NGOs under the control of Islamist fundamentalists. The ten most prominent Islamist NGOs having links with extremist activities include *Revival of Islamic Heritage Society (RIHS)*, *Rabita Al-Alam Al-Islami*, *Society of Social Reforms*, *Qatar Charitable*

Box 1: Link between Mainstream Islamist Party and Religious
Extremists: Source of Funding

The countrywide horrible serial bomb blasts by Jama'atul-Mujahideen Bangladesh, JMB (on August 17, 2005, around 500 bombs were blasted within 30 minutes' time between 9:00-9:30 AM targeting the offices of the Deputy Commissioners and Collectorate and Court buildings) prompted some experts to delink the connection between the bombers-organisations (for example, officially banned JMB or JMB) and the mainstream "Islamic" political party in Bangladesh. This disconnect is neither established, nor can it be established. On the contrary, connections and links are more probable. This is because of the following: not only the armed Jihadis but also the mainstream open "Islamic" party have declared their common vision to "Capture State Power"; the party chief openly declared that "Islamic rule will be established soon" and "Wait and see.... Get ready for directive"; the mainstream open "Islami" party has not yet denounced the bombing activities and bombing organisations by name; almost all the militant activists and leaders of JMB arrested were the members of Jamaat-e-Islami or their student front, and financial transactions related to organising the bomb attack have been made through their Bank accounts; and in almost all the cases, the mainstream Islamist party has lobbied for the release of arrested militants using their administrative support and government machinery, and in most cases they achieved the lobby-target, but where they failed, they announced that the arrested militant had been expelled from the party earlier. Such news was frequently published in all the prominent daily newspapers in Bangladesh: in *Prothom Alo*, September 21, 2005, titled "Five JMB leaders arrested in Chittagong were involved with Jamaat politics; Tk 160,000 was transacted through the Islami Bank"; the *Daily Star*, August 31, 2005 "34 Islamic NGOs get over Tk 200 cr. (USD 33 million) from donors a year"; the *Daily Star*, September 22, 2005 "Jamaat link to militants becomes evident"; the *Daily Ittefaq*, September 26, 2005 "Over 1000 militants have been released, and 40 per cent of them belong to Jamaat-e-Islami"; the *Daily Star*, December 5, 2005 "Just days before the November 29 carnage on two court premises, the government gave consent to release a fund of about USD 333,333 (Bd.Tk 20 million) to the Bangladeshi branch of a Kuwaiti NGO, Revival Islamic Heritage Society (RIHS), which is at the top of the list of suspected donors to Islamic militants in the country". More so, the Islamic Bank Bangladesh Ltd has been fined three times by the Bangladesh Bank (the Central Bank) for covering up "militant transactions" (see, Harrison 2013).

Society, Al-Muntada Al-Islami, Islamic Relief Agency, Al-Forkan Foundation, International Relief Organisation, Kuwait Joint Relief Committee, Muslim Aid Bangladesh. Their external financial support mostly comes from the Middle East. Many receive financial support even from the developed imperialist countries. It has been found that in many cases they receive money direct, the accounts of which are absent in government documents. The primary object of the NGOs under the control of fundamentalists is to reach the grassroots people using the platform of the institutions and subsequently establish and consolidate linkages between their political agenda and economic interest. When the mainstream NGOs are making efforts to empower women, the fundamentalist NGOs are not lagging behind. But they say, "Women's empowerment has to be achieved under the veil." In addition to the NGOs, the *economics of fundamentalism* is overactive in instituting trusts and foundations which are fully tax rebated.

comes from the pharmaceutical industry and health institutions, including diagnostic centres, 9.4 per cent comes from educational institutions, 8.0 per cent comes from real estate business, 7.4 per cent comes from the media and IT business, and 7.4 per cent comes from the transport sector (see Table 1). Although the above net profit earning is primarily based on heuristic estimates, the pattern is (at least) indicative of the direction. At the same time, this pattern of net profit earning by various sectors and sub-sectors of the economy of fundamentalism is in congruence with the trends of the mainstream economy.

If the economy of fundamentalism earns a net profit of about USD 367 million a year, in that case, the degree of communalisation of the Bangladesh economy—indicating the strength-extent of economic fundamentalism—will be equivalent to: 1.02 per cent of the annual national investment (at current prices), or 1.31 per cent of the private sector investment in the country, or 2.1 per cent of the government's annual revenue collections, or 1.54 per cent of the export earnings of the country, or 5.58 per cent of the government's annual development budget, or 8.62 per cent of the annual development budget of the government.

In addition to what is presented above, in understanding the future possibility of expansion of the economy of fundamentalism, it is essential to point out that the annual growth rate of the economy of fundamentalism is higher (annual average growth rate of 9.1%) than the annual growth rate of the mainstream economy (annual average growth of 5%-7%), and, therefore, as such there is no doubt that other things remaining the same, the communalisation of the Bangladesh economy will further mount. It is more so because the total amount of cumulative net profit of the economy of fundamentalism in Bangladesh during the last 40 years (1975-2015) would be at least USD 25 billion.

'Economy of Islamist Fundamentalism in Bangladesh' is not merely a reality; without a doubt, it is an all-encompassing and ever-increasing economy. It is an ever-increasing economy within the mainstream economy and, consequently, an ever-increasing religiosity in the cultural sphere of life. The direction of such causation is primarily determined by rising inequality, and our estimates in Table 2 adequately support the above notion.

In the last ten years, between 2005 and 2015, while the annual average growth rate of GDP was 5-7 per cent, the growth rate of the economy of Islamic fundamentalism was 9.1%. During the same ten years, the annual average growth rate in population was 1.175 per cent. However, the same for the enrolment of students at the religious schools (Aliya and Quomi Madrassas) was 1.32 per cent compared to 1.18 per cent in the mainstream schools (Primary plus Secondary schools and Colleges). During 2005 and 2015, the relative share of students in

*Table 1: Sector-Institution wise breakup of annual net profit of economy of fundamentalism in Bangladesh- estimates for 2015**

Sector-Institution	Annual net profit (in US\$ million)	Percentage share in total net profit
Financial Institution:		
Bank, Insurance, Leasing Company.	101.8	27.8
Trading organization:		
Retail, Wholesale, Departmental store	39.0	10.6
Pharmaceutical Industry, Health Institution including Diagnostic centre	36.6	10.0
Educational Institution:		
School, College, University, Coaching Centres	34.6	9.4
Transport and Communications:		
Rickshaw, vans, three-wheeled CNG, Car, Truck, Bus, Launch, Steamers, Ocean-going Vessels, etc.	27.2	7.4
Real Estate: Land, Building	29.3	8.0
Media and IT	27.0	7.4
NGOs, Trusts, and Foundations	71.0	19.4
Total	366.5	100

* About the methodology of estimation: The author first presented this estimation in 2005 (for details, see Barkat Abul 2005a, 2005c, 2006a). A heuristic method has been followed in estimating the profit of economic sectors-institutions. Although the process is based on assumptions, estimation is scientific to a large extent. In this regard, expert opinion of various sectors has been taken. In some cases, the estimates may be more or less than the actual figure (absolute truth is not known to anyone; that is not published.) Although formal data about investment is available in the case of a few sectors-institutions (which is again not close to reality), in most cases, such data are absent/unpublished. Also, though the published audit report and/or annual report are available in some cases, in most cases, they are incomplete and highly inaccurate, and therefore, totally misleading.

secular education has declined, and that in the religious stream has increased. The most alarming was the case with Quomi Madrassa, with an annual average growth rate of the number of students surpassing all types of the education system-reaching at 1.79 per cent; they constitute 15.7 per cent of all students and 55.9 per cent of all madrassa students in Bangladesh (and the trend shows upward movement). All these are happening in a context when inequality is rising: during the last ten years (between 2005 and 2015), the Gini coefficient reached 0.482 in 2016 (from 0.467 in 2005), and the Palma ratio reached 2.92 in 2016 (from 2.62

in 2005). Scrutiny of our estimations presented in Table 2 would be adequate to conclude 'dangerous time ahead' attributed to the economy of Islamist Fundamentalism in Bangladesh.

Furthermore, a few points can be added with a high degree of certainty to substantiate the analysis of organization and management decisions of the economics of fundamentalism and associated extremism. These are as follows:

First, they have invested both for short-term and long-term benefits in the sectors in which it is possible to earn the highest possible profit. It means that whatever interest they display about life hereafter, they are more conscious than anyone else about the material life in this world. *Second*, they are primarily interested in strategic investment. *Third*, they have chosen such sectors for investment which allows them to reach more people with higher speed. *Fourth*, their sector-wise investment portfolio is highly balanced. *Fifth*, it is possible for them to appoint 500,000 full-time cadres in organisational work by spending only 10 per cent of the net profit. They do so and provide cross-subsidy to other sectors from the net profit. *Sixth*, they (mis) use their political and economic power (using *Jihad* as the pretext) for placing their ultra-communal cadres in a planned way in critical strategic positions of the government, autonomous and semi-autonomous bodies, and in private sector institutions.

In order to sharpen our understanding of the emergence and pattern of Islamist fundamentalism and extremism, it would be appropriate to indicate a few more things associated with the expansion and prospect of economics and related politics of fundamentalism and extremism in Bangladesh. The fact is that; we were complacent – to a large extent – with our Independence following Liberation War 1971. The reason for such is self-explanatory. As a nation, we have seen for the first time that the whole nation-building effort will follow the principles of democracy, nationalism, socialism, and secularism. If religious feelings of the mainstream people are liberal and humanistic and if those have been ingrained in our mental frame for generations, in that case, there will be all the good reasons that those four principles are consistent with our dormant ambitions and aspirations, which can be termed "DNA factor". The reason for our self-complacence could probably be: We were the first in the third world and mainly first in the Muslim majority countries to include secularism in the Constitution (of 1972; of course discarded later on with the inclusion of "Islam will be the state religion". We were satisfied with the reflection of our dormant aspirations in our Constitution. However, religious ultra-communal forces – the 'war criminals' and collaborators of the Pakistan army whom we pardoned (and thus we became the bearer of mainstream Islam) – understood it clearly that the state was being run

Table 2: Trends in GDP, population, economic inequality, the economy of fundamentalism, and education (secular and religious), Bangladesh, between 2005 and 2015

Sl. Indicators	2005	2015	2015 as times of 2005	Annual average growth rate between 2005 and 2015
1. Gross Domestic Product (GDP in BDT billion)	6,039 ¹	18,604 ¹	3.08	5%-7%
2. Economy of fundamentalism (annual net profit, in BDT billion)	12.00 ²	28.74 ³	2.40	9.1%
Economy of fundamentalism as % of GDP	0.20	0.15	0.78	-
3. Economic inequality (income inequality):				
- Gini coefficient	0.467 ⁴	0.482 ⁵ (2016)	1.03	-
- Palma ratio	2.62 ⁶	2.92 ⁶ (2016)	1.11	-
4. Population	139,035,505	156,256,287	1.12	1.175%
5. Education: Religious and Secular streams				
# Students of Madrassa (Aliya+Quomi)	9,631,187 ⁷	10,980,000 ⁸	1.14	1.32%
# Quomi Madrassa students	5,142,707 ⁷	6,140,000 ⁸	1.19	1.79%
-Enrolment in mainstream (Primary+Secondary+College)	24,991,456 ⁹	28,105,934 ¹⁰	1.12	1.18%
Total students	34,622,643	39,085,934	1.13	1.22%
% of students in secular stream	72.2	71.9	0.996	-
% of students in religious stream	27.8	28.1	1.01	-
Quomi students as % of total students	14.85	15.71	1.058	-
Quomi students as % of total madrassa students	53.4	55.9	1.047	-

Source: (1) Bangladesh Bank (2019). *Time series data since 1972*. Retrieved from (accessed on 06 April 2019), (2) Barkat A. (2005a). *Bangladeshe Moulobader Arthoniti* (3rd Edition), Dr Abdul Gafur Memorial Lecture-1, Dhaka: Jatiyo Sahityo Prokashoni, p.18. Dhaka., (3) Barkat A. (2016a). *Political Economy of Religion-based Extremism in Bangladesh: When in a Unitarian Imperialism External Causes Override Internal Causes*. In International Conference on Secularism, Democracy and Gender Parity in South Asia organized jointly by University of Dhaka, Research and Development Collective, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Institute of Asia Studies (India), and the India-Bangladesh Foundation. Dhaka: University of Dhaka, p. 43, (4) Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (2011). *Report of the Household Income & Expenditure Survey 2010*. p. 30, (5) Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (2019). *Household Income and Expenditure Survey 2016*. p. 31, (6) Author's Estimate based on *Time-series data since 1972*. Retrieved from (accessed on 06 April 2019), (7) World Bank (2019). (8) Barkat A. et al., (2011). *Political Economy of Madrassa Education in Bangladesh: Genesis, Growth, and Impact*. p. 129, (9) Barkat A., et al. (2011). *Political Economy of Madrassa Education in Bangladesh: Genesis, Growth, and Impact*. pp. 129, 292, (10) Barkat A., et al. (2011). *Political Economy of Madrassa Education in Bangladesh: Genesis, Growth, and Impact*. p. 293, (11) Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics (BANBEIS 2016). pp. 57, 73, 117.

make no fundamental change in the life of the people. Within a few years, they could foresee that our people would be de-motivated about the present leadership.

Moreover, if they make good use of the opportunity, their (the defeated forces in the Liberation War) victory would be inevitable. In contemporary periods, progress was relatively slow, but the religious forces marched forward with relatively high speed and took all the opportunities and preparations in secret. The result of such preparation was capturing the villages using deep tube-well centric society, peasant society, Mosque and Madrasa-whatever is the medium, establishing an undisputed stronghold in religious institutions, capturing the state institutions, capturing the economic- activity based institutions, and in the name of private institutions taking position among the low-income group people of the villages and towns and strengthened their presence. To execute this strategy, the economic institutions of fundamentalists played a targeted role. Likewise, due to adopting this strategy, those institutions were also strengthened. More so, all these combined generated synergistic effects. In this respect, religious fundamentalists were not idealistic in giving political leadership; they were realistic manifold. Following this process, during half a century, they have now reached a position where they can get an average vote of 15,000 people in each parliament seat (an average of 75,000 votes needed to win a seat). At the same time, they have now acquired the capacity to spend millions of black money and use muscle power in national parliamentary elections.

On the other hand, as displayed on 17th August 2005, they can organise nationwide serial bomb blasts with 100% military accuracy. More so, under the banner of Hefazat-e-Islam, on 5 May 2013, they have “invaded” the capital city Dhaka, displaying potential ‘Kilal’ like strength (i. e., the strength of frontal fight, which is the 4th and final phase of Jihad). In addition, during the last four years (2013-2016), the Ansarullah Bangla Team (ABT) has already killed 11 bloggers, free-thinking intellectuals; all of them are displaying their muscle power as well as the power of provocation throughout the country using all means including high-order information and communication technology. Moreover, on 5th September 2015, the banned Hijbut Tahrir organized a video teleconference inviting people to participate in toppling down the government and establishing Islami Khelafat; this has been televised throughout the country! In addition, on 1st July 2016, in a restaurant located in the diplomatic enclave of Dhaka, they have brutally killed 24 innocent people with 18 foreign citizens. By no means is this a weak opponent. On the contrary, this is a strong force representing a triangle of power with their open political party, the Jamaat-e-Islam as the corporate HQs and Islamist militant organizations (132 in numbers) and economic of

fundamentalism and NGOs and trusts as the two other arms of that triangle (see Figure 5).

Therefore, the situation has reached such a stage that even over 12 years ago from today, I consciously and cautiously portrayed the situation as below:

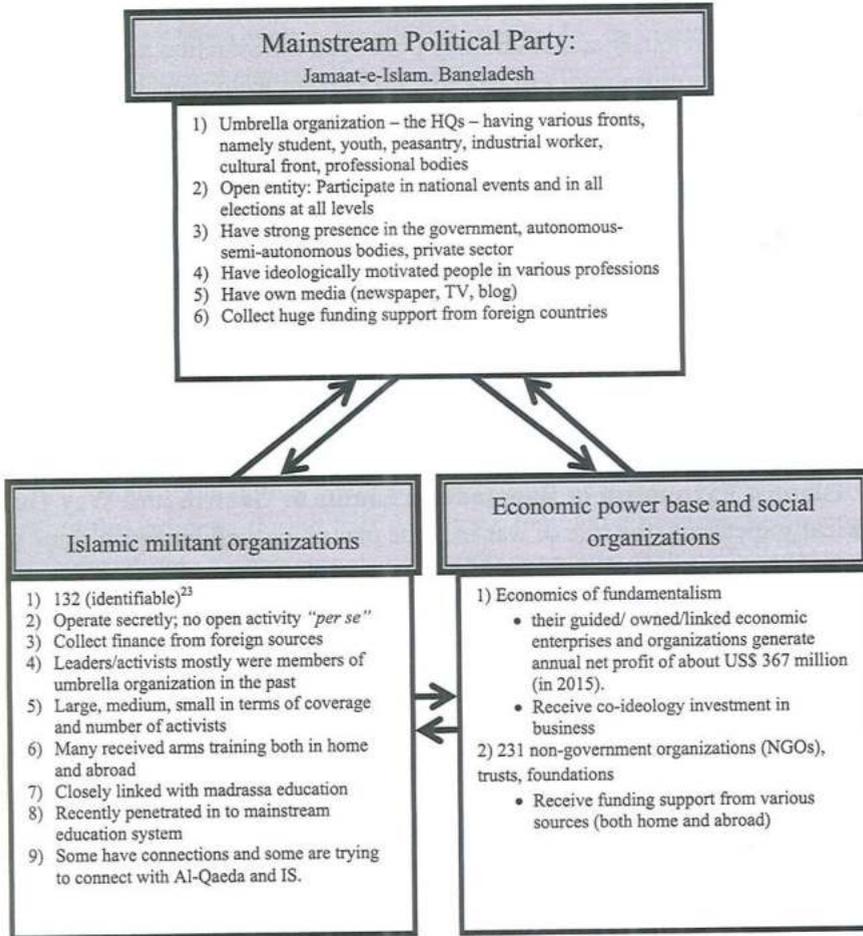
“The religious communal forces know for certain what they want. As against these, we do not know what we want. They are well organized to achieve their goal; we are unorganized. They do not hesitate about their aim and object, as we have confusions against this. They believe deeply in whatever they do. However, it seems we have lost confidence in ourselves. They can perfectly use the frustrations of the ever-growing unemployment among the youths to lead them to parochial interest. On the other hand, we avoid movement and struggle against poverty and frustrations due to unemployment among the youth. Our lack of clarity of thoughts, inactions, and disunity became blessings for the defeated forces” (Barkat 2004b).

8. Islamist Extremism in Bangladesh: Limits to Growth and Way Out

Historically speaking, the role of war in some places, peaceful ways in some other areas, and the mixture of the two in other places in the propagation of various religions, including Islam, is well known. It is notable that wherever sword war was used to propagate religion, outcomes were either monarchy or a repressive state. However, wherever a religion was propagated in a relatively peaceful way - for example, in our country where the Ulamaa’s, Sufi’s, and Devotees propagated Islam - in such places, a religion based on ultra-communal politics could not get a firm root. On the contrary, wherever the religious leaders tried to conduct the statecraft with the help of religion, they faced opposition. It is most likely because people have become religious-minded (pious) over generations due to the peaceful propagation of religion and following religious rites, but they never became dogmatic religionists. It means that the perception of religion, i.e., religiosity, has become the vehicle for communal harmony to a large extent as against communalism. This deep sense of harmony based on the humanitarian essence of religions is evident in the origin of Islam in East Bengal.

Moreover, the evolution of such a process has deeply ingrained that into the minds of Bengali-Muslims (which I term as “positive DNA factor”). It is why whatsoever strength economic fundamentalism and associated extremism may have acquired in Bangladesh; it is most likely that, if appropriately addressed with most entire possible political will and commitments, it would not be possible for them to capture the state power by using that economic and political strength. In

Figure 5: A simple model showing strategic interdependence of Islamist extremist forces in Bangladesh



23. The identity/name of these organizations are mentioned in Barkat (2018). As part of his comprehensive and in-depth research on “Political Economy of Islamist Fundamentalism in Bangladesh” the most part of the accompanying list has been prepared by the author of this paper during 2002-2005 period. Those identified after 2007 have been added in the above list. Most of the groups in the list are militant armed groups. Some of those groups are sub-local; some are local; some have wide areas of operation; some have international links. After the publication of this some of the Islamist militant organizations have been banned by the government though this does not mean stopping of activities by the banned organizations. In 2005, government has banned activities of the following 5 Islamist militant organizations: Harkat-ul Jihad Al-Islam, Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh (JMJB), Jamah-tul-Mujahedeen Bangladesh (JMB), Harkat-ul Jihad Al-Islami Bangladesh (HUJI-B), and Shahadat Al-Hikmat. The government has banned activities of Hijb-ut-Tahrir in 2009 and Ansarullah Bangla Team on 25 May 2015. In addition, the government has blacklisted the following extremist outfits: Hizbut Towhid, Olama Anjuman al Baianat, Islami Samaj, Allahar Dal, Ta Amir-ul Din Bd, Towhid Trust, and Islamic Democratic Party.

this regard six examples presented below are adequately indicative enough to show the inherent strength of the above stated “positive DNA factor”:

First, in Bangladesh, due to the Enemy Property Act or Vested Property Act, a total of about 2.6 million acres of the landed property of 6 million Hindus have been grabbed by only 0.4 per cent Muslims (if the snatchers are all Muslims at all). It implies that 99.6 per cent of Muslims are not involved in grabbing landed property of people belonging to the other religions (some people try to show it as a Hindu versus Muslim conflict).

Second, whatever help the state might have given to the communal fundamentalists of Baghmara-Bangla Bhai (JMJB), people of the locality unitedly faced them. It is the outcome of inherent secular feelings among the majority Muslims of Bangladesh.

Third, in 1985 when the roof of the massive dormitory of Dhaka University, Jagannath Hall, collapsed, people irrespective of their religious identity came forward to donate their blood to save the wounded students. All of the victims of that tragedy were Hindus by religion, which probably indicates the inherent power of secular feelings among most Muslims in Bangladesh.

Fourth, how the mass people came forward to protest against the planned mass massacre made to the Buddhist Community by the Jamaat-Islamic extremists in Ramu of Cox’s Bazar in 2012 (27-28 September), isn’t it a reflection of the inherent non-communal feelings of the ordinary people of this country?

Fifth, since February 2013, irrespective of race-religion-cast-rich-poor, the bold stand the young generation (the *GonoJagoran Monchho*) against fundamentalism, and the situation continues, isn’t it enough to prove that the young generation of this country is fully imbued with the spirit of liberation-freedom? Is not it proof that the young generation comprising over 50 per cent of the people of Bangladesh is adequately conscious of and ready to counter all forms of religious extremism?

Sixth, containing positive DNA of Islam, whether any ordinary Muslim of this country supports the activities of the suicide bombers? Or, almost all Muslims in this country sincerely believe that the misdeeds of the fundamentalist and extremists are deep intrigue and impiety in the name of religion?

The greatest danger in the rise of politics and economics of Islamist fundamentalism and extremism in Bangladesh lies in the *institutionalization of fundamentalism*, implying organized penetration of Islamist fundamentalists forces (with ideology assimilating *mythos* of religion with *logos* of reality) in all critical spheres of life and state operation, namely in economic sectors, in political institutions, in critical positions in the administration and judiciary, in government –autonomous–semi-autonomous bodies and private sectors, in educational

institutions with predominance in Madrassa system (and most recently in the mainstream education system), in health, in NGOs, in women's organizations, and many professional bodies. Because of their command of over 5-7 per cent votes (more importantly, their rate of casting a vote is almost 100 per cent), within an equi-strength bi-partisan political system (the two major political parties in Bangladesh are Bangladesh Awami League and Bangladesh Nationalist Party) the major mainstream Islamist party is strategically well-positioned in forming the government after the national parliamentary election. Moreover, they use this strength to their advantage in further institutionalization of Islamist fundamentalism. The degree of this institutionalized strength of Islamic fundamentalism and extremism is evident, among others, in their following statements of last ten years, which are adequately indicative of what is there in their mind:

"We are not a drop of water on betel leaf that a nimble touch would just make us fall" (Jamaat-e-Islam Bangladesh).

"You will misjudge our strength if you try to understand us by the number of our seats in the parliament" (Jamaat-e-Islam Bangladesh).

"Wait and see, Islamic shariah rule will be established soon" (JMB, JMJB).

"Suicide is a great sin in Islam, but it is permissible in "Jihad" (Jamaat-e-Islam Bangladesh; JMB, ABT).

"Man-made Constitution should be replaced by the Shariah Laws" (JMB, JMJB, ABT, HUJI-B).

"Be ready to face a civil war" (Hefazat-e-Islam).

"The fight of the people believing in only one Allah will continue till our 13-points demands are not fulfilled" (Hefazat-e-Islam).

"We demand hanging of the leaders of the People's Awakening Platform of Shahabag Gono Jagoran Monchho" (Hefazat-e-Islam).

"We demand capital punishment of all those who speak anything against Islam" (Hijbut Tahrir, Shahadat-e-Hikma).

"We demand hanging of atheists without trial" (Hefazat-e-Islam; Ansarullah Bangla Team).

"Topple down the government now and establish Khelafat" (on 5 September 2015 through nationally televised video conference by a banned extremist organization, *Hijbut Tahrir*).

In addition to what is stated above, the relative strength of *institutionalized fundamentalism* and associated extremism is also evident in the formation and operation of the Islamic Shariah Council against the usual norm of the Central

Bank (the Bangladesh Bank). The Islamic Shariah Council- the central policy-making body of all Islamic financial institutions – is a body fully controlled by the mainstream Islamist party and headed by the *Pesh Imam* (the head) of the National Mosque, who is a government servant who preaches in favour of the implementation of Shariah rule through mosque-based administration and judiciary. According to the Company Act and Banking Act operating in Bangladesh, this Islamic Shariah Council is illegal.²⁴

In addition to its institutionalisation, the danger of religious extremism lies in the *'logos'* part of its political ideology reflected in its pragmatic ('beyond dogma') actions. It is evident, among others, in the following 'realistic'(!) strategic political statement of the mainstream Islamist party—the Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh:

"Women leadership (as head of the state and/or government) is not recognized in Islam; however, women leadership is acceptable if 'we' are in alliance with party-in-power."

"Profiteering (bank interest) is a sin in Islam; however, it is allowed if 'our' financial institutions practice profiteering with a different name."

"The United States of America is enemy of Islam, but US intervention in Iraq is not a problem if 'we' are in power (in Bangladesh)."

"India is an enemy State, but there is no problem signing an unjust contract/ agreement if 'we' are in power (in Bangladesh)."

The secular and humanistic origin of Islam in East Bengal provides adequate rationale to be complacent about the future secular development of Bangladesh. However, in reality, there is no logical room for complacency. It is not only because of the global non-congenial context for the same. On the one hand, the politics of Islamist extremism is based solely on dogma and devoid of any reasoning. On the other, the economic power-based political process has already been institutionalized, to a large extent. Both economies of fundamentalism and politics of religious-militant extremism have gone too far, and damage can be irreversible if not addressed timely and intelligently. For many countries globally, including Bangladesh, this is ultimately an issue of building a progressive society for our future generations. Therefore, the fight is more political than just intellectual. The way the basis of the economics of Islamist extremism has

²⁴ It is important to note that almost all banks of national and foreign origin across Bangladesh – have Islamic *Shariah* window; and many of them use the word "Islam" as part of the name of their Banks. The same is happening in case of other financial and non-financial enterprises including industries and service sectors.

extended and is expanding — the fight has to be total, all-encompassing, multi-dimensional, and multi-faceted. This fight is against a regressive mindset by the progressive forces. For the Sufis, Devotees, and enlightened religious learned persons, this is a fight against anti-humanist communalism for re-establishing the humanistic trend of Islam in East Bengal. Therefore, in this fight, on the one side, to face the ultra-communal parochial trends of Islam, the humanistic proponents of Islam — the Sufi's and Ulama's must stand — as they are historically the proponent of mainstream Islam, they should unite together, and on the other hand, secular non-communal feelings and free-thinking which form the basis of liberty and freedom should pave the way for expanding the humanistic state system. It can be the only way to weaken the undesirable economic basis of fundamentalism and associated religious extremism. *Economics of fundamentalism* and related ultra-communal politics — both are backward. Therefore, to remove such religion-mediated backwardness and ensure progress, there is no alternative but to devote all-out efforts towards uniting people based on the actual process of enlightenment.

Based on the nature of the evolution of the political economy of religious fundamentalism and associated extremism, it is inevitable that if we think that all the relevant problems will be solved instantly, then it will be a denial of absolute truth and, out of mere emotion may lead to a historical blunder. It is impossible to extirpate the communal extremism immediately because, within a few days, it is impossible to break the economic and social foundations (both local and global) on which it is grounded. The accelerated implementation of a “damage minimizing strategy” and a “risk reduction strategy” is possible now. As a short term solution, the “damage minimization strategy” may be to pursue a set of doable at a time: (1) To arrange a third-party audit to uncover the Jamaat-extremist connection with the economy of fundamentalism, i.e., to uncover the pathways and nature of financial transactions of the fundamentalists. It should include the transactions through Hundi/ Hawla and e-transactions. The outcomes may include nationalisation, confiscation, legal transfer, changing management, changing Board etc.; (2) By rapid trial to execute the punishment of those who made crime against humanity and war-crime in 1971, and are also the god-father of fundamentalism-extremism (if possible, by the year 2018); (3) To publish-circulate in the mass media whatever is known to the government about the source of funding and fire arms including explosive of the extremists; (4) To stop the channel of money and arms of the extremists; (5) To confiscate the wealth of extremists; and use the same for the 1971 martyrs, crippled, leading insolvent life, and for those who died due to fundamentalism — extremism; (6) To arrest and

give exemplary punishment to them all who are directly-indirectly related with extremist activities; (7) To identify those who, within the government, are promoting religious extremism; (8) To strengthen people's movement to ban religion-based communal politics; (9) To launch profound awareness raising efforts for the mass people to unveil the real face-aims-objectives of the extremists so that people spontaneously participate in the process of countering religious extremism. In this immediate and short-term programme, the state and the government need to play a proactive role at one end. At the other end, a united, well-organized movement of the secular political-social forces need to be built in rural and urban areas.

Furthermore, there may be only one long-term solution to establish a secular mindset. It needs to implement the political promises, including removing all economic, social, and political inequality sources. There is no other alternative but to pursue conscious efforts to unite all secular people to implement short-and long-term solutions.

Now, before I deal with some of the unexplored areas and newly-learned issues (which I call *second-order* way forward) and come to the point of what has been done in Bangladesh in countering religious extremism as well as what others can do, it would be appropriate to recapitulate what has already been said, which is as follows:

The expanded religious fanaticism, armed communalism, and associated fundamentalisation of the economy are not a simple social problem *per se* (among many other problems). It some what indicates a deep-rooted crisis of embattled faith rooted in increasing inequality and fear. The crisis emanated from politics of communalism and economics of fundamentalism can be overcome only through enlightened political movement guided by courageous, patriotic leadership backed by substantive public actions. I see the seeds of success in both the essence of the evolution of Islam in East Bengal, which is secular, humanistic, and democratic and in the Bangladesh people's history of already displayed strength in fighting odds against liberty and freedom. One should not forget and discount the fact that Bangladesh people fought successfully for their right to language (1952), right to say no to neo-colonial governance (1954), right to upsurge (1969), right to liberate and enjoy independence (1971), and right to throw out military autocracy (1990), and fight for the punishment of 1971 War criminals and against religious fundamentalism (Shahabag 2013). The ground for hope is historically fertile in Bangladesh. The only thing needed is to timely and appropriately cultivate the ground based on the spirit of democracy, secularism, nationalism, and socialism — the foundation stones of the 1971 Liberation War and the basis

of the 1972 Constitution of Bangladesh. In the long run, fighting religious extremism by keeping mass people unempowered and poor is a dubious proposition. It is time to devise the most appropriate strategy to simultaneously negotiate rising religiosity with rising inequality – a problematic practical issue to resolve because one breeds the other.

In the ultimate analysis, economic exploitation itself is the crucial source and origin of all sorts of fundamentalism – religious and ethnic, socio-cultural and political, national and global. Exploitation creates and procreates alienation and inequality in all the spheres of social life, which, in turn, paves the way for expanding all possible routes of fundamentalism, including religion-based fundamentalist militancy.

9. ‘Jihad’ in Bangladesh: From ‘Dawa’ to ‘Kilal’.

What is New? What has been done? Who can do What?

“There are 1.3 billion Muslims today worldwide. If the 7% (91 million) of the politically radicalized continue to feel politically dominated, occupied, and disrespected, the West will have little, if any, the chance of changing their minds.”

—John Esposito and Dalia Mogahed, 2007

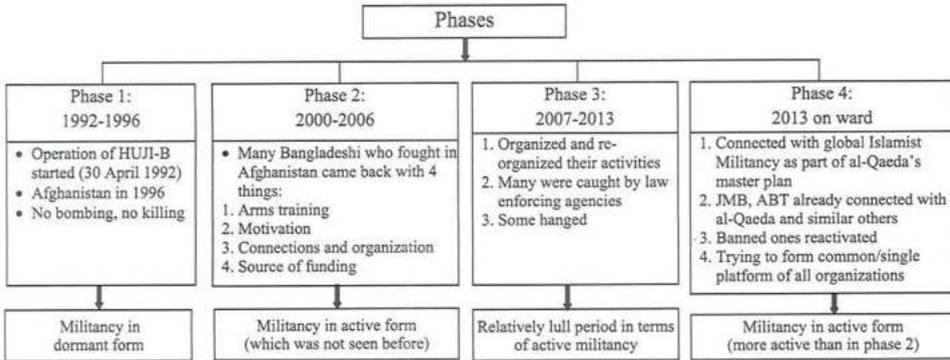
In the relevant academia and the counter-extremism intelligence, many things about mission, vision, formation, organization, funding, operation, linkages of the religious extremism and extremists are more or less known irrespective of extent, validity, and accuracy of that knowledge. However, based on my twenty years of research experience in the relevant field, I can conclude with a high probability that our knowledge base and practical action in countering religious extremism – are still limited. On this, there are still many “unknown unknowns”; there are lots of speculation; there are lots of confusions; there are lots of either underestimation or overestimation on specific pertinent issues; there are many unexplored issues; there are many emerging issues some of which we learn after a long time lag when it is too late to know about. These are true for global, regional, national, sub-national, and local.

Keeping the above stated in view, let me, first of all, share my research-based knowledge about al-Qaeda – the corporate headquarters of Islamist extremism (while writing it, I am fully aware of almost all published materials about al-Qaeda). Al-Qaeda had a draft Master Plan prepared in around 1995-1997, and then they have finalized the master plan aiming at establishing Islamic Shariah-based states in many countries. The critical specific time-bound strategic mission-components in al-Qaeda’s Master Plan are as follows:

1. The Plan divides the timeline of their vision into five key phases: 2000-2003 (phase 1), 2003-2006 (phase 2), 2006-2009 (phase 3), 2009-2012 (phase 4), and 2016-2025 (phase 5).
2. By the end of phase 5, i.e., by 2025, the ‘Khelafat’ rule will be established in Muslim population-dominated countries.
3. No country will be there which will be out of Khelafat rule for 100 years. Quoting Hadith, the plan predicts that since the last Khelafat — Hajrat Osman’s Khelafat was dissolved in 1924, 100 years after that, by 2024-25 again, Khelafat rule must be instituted. Moreover, all activities shall be directed to materialize that.
4. Taleban will retake Afghanistan by 2016 (i.e., in the early days of phase 5).
5. In the process of retaking of Afghanistan, they will create a “threat belt” comprising of India (specifically Kashmir, Ahmedabad, Gujarat, Assam, and Seven sisters; and they will destabilize seven sisters by 2018), Myanmar (especially Arakan with Rohingya), and Bangladesh (from geographic and geopolitical consideration).
6. They will organize two “Manama,” meaning World Wars. The first “Manama” will occur in the “Hind Zone,” i.e., India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Nepal, Bhutan, Afghanistan. The Second “Manama” will occur in the “Sam Zone,” meaning Syria, Jordan, Palestine, and surrounding areas.
7. In realizing this Master Plan, they will pass through all four stages of “Jihad”, namely “Dawa” (meaning inviting people and conveying their messages using all forms), then “Edad” meaning all sorts of preparatory work, then ‘Ribat’ meaning minor scale clashes, and then finally, ‘Kilal’ meaning frontal war.”

The second less explored and less known issue is related to the transformation of Islamist extremism in Bangladesh and their relationship with the global extremist outfit — Al-Qaeda. I have already provided the list of 132 radical Islamic organisations in Bangladesh that promote Islamic political activism. Now, the issue is when and how these organisations emerged and whether a phasing with a timeline and content can be worked out or not? Here, my answer is “Yes”, based on substantive facts and arguments. According to my informed judgment, in terms of a timeline, the Islamist extremism in Bangladesh can be categorized into four phases: 1992-1996 (phase 1), 2000-2007 (phase 2), 2007-2012 (phase 3), and 2013 onward (phase 4) (see Figure 6).

Figure 6: Transformative phases of Islamist Extremist organizations in Bangladesh



Source: Developed by the author (Barkat 2018)

Formally speaking, Islamist extremism started in Bangladesh on 30 April 1992 with the formal declaration of their operation by Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami Bangladesh (HUJI-B). This first phase is related to the Afghan War in 1996. This phase can be termed “Militancy in the dormant form” (because we have not seen any bombing or similar attacks). The second phase, 2000-2007, can be termed “Militancy in Active Form”. In this phase, many of the militants who fought in Afghanistan came back to Bangladesh with four substantive weapons of Islamist extremism. They brought with them (1) Jihadi arms training, (2) Jihadi motivation, (3) Relevant connections and organisations, and (4) Source of the fund. The third phase, 2007-2012, is a lull period of active militancy. However, they have used this phase to organise and reorganise their future activities for the next phase. In my view, the fourth (and so far final) phase, 2013 onward, is the most dangerous phase coinciding with the phasing-plan of al-Qaeda’s Master Plan. This phase may be termed the “Second phase of Active Militancy”. In this phase, many Bangladeshi Islamist extremists have already made connections with al-Qaeda or are trying to establish living contacts and connections with international Islamist extremist organizations. The banned extremist outfits JMB and ABT have already established links with al-Qaeda. They are trying to work with all other militant organizations in Bangladesh under a common platform.

The question is — in which phase of Jihad (which has 4 phases) do we keep lingering. I am sure we have crossed phase 1 of Jihad (i. e., Dawa), we have crossed phase 2 of Jihad (i. e., ‘Edad’), and in some senses, we have also crossed phase 3 of Jihad (i. e.; ‘Ribat’ meaning minor clashes). Then are we in the last phase, i. e., Phase 4 “Kilal” meaning ready for the frontal fight? I think Islamist extremism in Bangladesh can impartially be positioned as something between

phases 3 and 4, i. e., transforming from small classes to getting ready for frontal war. It would be self-satisfying and good if I am found wrong on this. However, I have no substantive reason to believe that my idea about this is wrong.

Moreover, this brings to the grave and complex issue of what has been done already and who can do what in countering religious extremism in South Asia and globally. Globally-because the issue, to me, is an issue of “potential global catastrophe”. Therefore, countering religious extremism’s “think globally act locally” formula may not work. Instead, the more feasible and necessary formula should be “think globally, act globally, act concertedly, act with zero tolerance” (I know some might argue differently by bringing some lame arguments!). Considering complexity and reality, I have already pointed out that the best strategy can be joint persuasion of “Risk Reduction Strategy” and “Damage Minimizing Strategy” simultaneously.

Under these potentially catastrophic contexts, the pertinent issue here is what the Bangladesh Government has already done and is planning to counter Islamist extremism in Bangladesh. Without putting any marks on the score sheet, let me list out actions the government of Bangladesh has taken. Among the many actions taken by the government, the key ones are as follows: undertaken a “Zero Tolerance Policy” towards all forms and sorts of terrorist acts; prepared a draft Counter-Terrorism Strategy and Anti-Terrorism Act 2009; banned six most dangerous Islamist extremist organisations; black list seven most suspected Islamist extremist outfits; enacted Anti-Terrorism Act 2009; formulated Anti-Terrorism Act rules 2013; enacted Anti-money laundering and combating terrorist financing Act 2012; formed Counter-Terrorism Intelligence Bureau (CTIB) to deal exclusively with counter-terrorism issues (which has dedicated CT professionals to address CT’s surveillance, analysis, and operation aspect; a core working group coordinates); organise regular coordination meetings on the subject among the intelligence and law enforcement agencies; activated all counter-terrorism intelligence organisations (DGFI, NSI, Armed forces intelligence organizations, Special Branch, Detective Branch) and law enforcement agencies (police, RAB, Ansar, VDP); coordinate various aspects of counter-terrorism each month through the National Committee for Intelligence Coordination chaired by the Honourable Prime Minister; coordinate all stakeholders working in counter-terrorism by the Ministry of Home Affairs; formed Bangladesh Financial Intelligence Unit (BFIU) as a national Committee under the Ministry of Finance, which monitors and formulates policy to counter-terrorist financing; undertaken counter-radicalisation programme; launched

general awareness and motivation campaign to make people aware of the negative impact of religious extremism; signed SAARC Regional Convention on Supervision of Terrorism (in 1987) and Additional Protocol, 2004 (for details, see Barkat 2015b).

From a Neurotheology point of view (which I will explain relatively elaborately in the next section), the activity of “*organising delivery of correct messages of Islam during Friday Jumma prayer*” can be treated as one of the most effective and ethically correct ways of raising people’s awareness about the correct interpretation of Islam as well as countering Islamist extremism. It is simply because today (in 2016), out of 160 million people in Bangladesh, an estimated 26.4 million Muslim male population aged five years and above attends Jumma prayer (which is 39.5% of the Muslim male population aged five years and above). Moreover, this estimated 26.4 million people who attend Jumma prayer also propagate their learning to many others, i.e., this has a multiplier effect. Financially, this is almost a zero-cost intervention with a higher invaluable social return. Because official data on the total number of mosques and number of people attending Jumma prayer are not available — to avoid any confusion — it would be appropriate here to put on record the methodology used for the estimation. In estimating the number of people who attend Jumma prayer, the following data and assumptions were taken into consideration: (1) the total number of mosques in Bangladesh is 264,940 (it was 191,986 in 2008, see Barkat et al. 2011); a 4.7 per cent annual growth rate in the number of mosques has been assumed (the annual growth rate in the number of Madrassa between 1970 and 2005 was 4.7%); (2) the total population in 2016 has been 160 million of which 51.5 percent male and 49.5 percent female; and 90 percent of the population is Muslim; (3) It was assumed that it is most likely that only Muslim male population with age five years and above are eligible to attend Jumma prayers (which equals to 66.8 million people); (4) it was assumed that on average 100 Muslim male population per mosque attends Jumma prayers (which equals to 26.4 million people).

Religious extremism is locally manifested but a global issue. Therefore global partners must be proactively engaged in countering religious extremism, in which simultaneous persuasion of “Risk Reduction Strategy” and “Damage Minimizing Strategy” should get priority. Keeping this in view, I would like to forward some suggestions about what the governments of the other countries can think of doing or consider in countering worldwide religious extremism (and more specifically in Bangladesh). Based on my knowledge about the subject and discussions with the relevant stakeholders in Bangladesh, I would like to forward the following suggestions which each government may consider:

1. Provide sponsorship support to some of the counter-radicalisation programmes (e. g., sharing of knowledge through the seminar,

workshops, conferences, sharing intelligence, one-to-one meetings involving academia, intelligence professionals, relevant civil society, experts in theology, experts in Neurotheology and human behaviour, and organize rigorous, meaningful media campaign and exposures).

2. Provide funding and technical assistance support in eliminating the critical sources of religious extremism. These may include support in reducing poverty, disparity, inequality; in improving progressive content of education curriculum; in assisting in enhanced access of children from low-income families to mainstream education; in reaching young people with all pertinent information about the potential damages of religious extremism; in auditing relevant financial institutions through deploying competent Audit firms.
3. Provide financial and technical support to the complex re-radicalization programme (the Bangladesh prison authority is not knowledgeable and technically competent enough).
4. Assist in Cyber Space management.
5. Provide capacity-building support to the relevant intelligence.
6. Provide technical assistance support to establish a real-time central database for immigration purposes (all immigration including air, land, water).
7. Assist in the CVE programme on public awareness building.
8. In providing grant aid support to the NGOs, carefully scrutinize the link of the NGO with religious extremists and accordingly take decisions. Promote NGOs working with poor and marginalized people, excluded people, women, and those promoting secular values.

The above-stated suggestions and considerations may be seen as supply-side suggestions from many governments sides. However, supply creates its own demand. The demand side suggestions for considerations may be as follows:

1. Based on experience, the rich country governments need to seriously review the “War on Terror” policy; and adjust or reformulate it accordingly.
2. They need to re-find out and address the root causes of religious extremism.
3. They need to emphasize the complex social-economic-cultural-diplomatic solution rather than the military solution addressing religious extremism.

4. They need to think about a non-imposed solution (i.e., a solution from outside that lacks the party's sense of ownership on the other side of the table).
5. They need to take proactive initiative towards activating regional forums to address the potential catastrophic related to religious extremism, and more importantly, the causes of religion-based fundamentalism and militancy.

10. Understanding Neurotheology Matters in Addressing Religious Extremism: Religion and Brain

Almost all of us in this 8 billion — people world want to live in peace and prosperity; we all want well-being — individual and social; and almost no one wants to live in a society dominated by backwardness, religious fanaticism, communal in fights, and a situation of life-threatening insecurity. Therefore, to draw any feasible and practically implementable plan for “Countering Religious Extremism”, in addition to economic, social, and political causalities of rising and operation of religious extremism, to understand why religion matters. In this connection, we need to understand the following, among many other relevant issues (some of which have already been discussed): Why are so many people religious? What are the evolutionary advantages of religion? What constitutes a religious brain?

In today's world, around ten thousand different religions exist. Each religion is convinced that there is only one Truth and that they alone possess it. Hating people with a different faith seems to be part of belief. Around 1500, the church reformer Martin Luther described Jews as a “brood of vipers”. Over the centuries, the Christian hatred of the Jews led to pogroms and ultimately made the Holocaust possible. In 1947, over a million people, were slaughtered when British India was partitioned into India for the Hindus and Pakistan for the Muslims. Nor has interfaith hatred diminished since then. Since 2000, 43 per cent of civil wars have been religious.

Almost 64 per cent of the world's population is Catholic, Protestant, Muslim, or Hindu (for details about religion-wise population and projections, see Pew Research Centre 2015, Hackett et al. 2015). Moreover, faith is extremely tenacious. In 2007, one-third of Chinese people over sixteen said that they were religious. Around 95 per cent of Americans say they believe in God, 90 per cent pray, 82 per cent believe God can perform miracles, and over 70 per cent believe in life after death. It is striking that only 50 per cent believe in hell, which shows a certain lack of consistency. In 1996 a poll of American scientists revealed that only 39 per cent were believers, a

much smaller percentage than the national average. Only 7 per cent of the country's top scientists (defined for this poll as the members of the National Academy of Sciences) professed a belief in God. At the same time, almost no Nobel laureates are religious. A mere 3 per cent of the eminent scientists' members of Britain's Royal Society are religious. Scientists also differ per discipline: Biologists are less prone to believe in God and the hereafter than physicists. So it is not surprising that the vast majority (78%) of eminent evolutionary biologists polled called themselves materialists (meaning that they believe physical matter to be the only reality). Almost three-quarters (72%) of them regarded religion as a social phenomenon that had evolved along with *Homo sapiens*. They saw it as part of evolution rather than conflicting with it.

It does indeed seem that religion must have afforded an evolutionary advantage. Receptiveness to religion is determined by spirituality, which is 50 per cent genetically determined, as twin studies have shown. Spirituality is a characteristic that everyone has, even if they do not belong to a church. Religion is the local shape given to our spiritual feelings. The decision to be religious or not certainly is not "free". The surroundings in which we grow up cause the parental religion to imprint our brain circuits during early development, similar to our native language. Chemical messengers like serotonin affect the extent to which we are spiritual. The number of serotonin receptors in the brain corresponds to scores for spirituality (for details, see Dick Swaab 2015).

The religious programming of a child's brain starts after birth. The British evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins incensed when reference is made to "Christian, Muslim, or Jewish children", because young children do not have any kind of faith of their own; faith is imprinted in them at a very impressionable stage by their Christian, Muslim, or Jewish parents. Dawkins sees programmed belief as a by-product of evolution (Dawkins 2006). Children accept warnings and instructions issued by their parents and other authorities instantly and without argument, protecting them from danger. As a result, young children are credulous and easy to indoctrinate, and it might explain the universal tendency to retain parental faith. Copying, the foundation of social learning, is a highly efficient mechanism, and we even have a separate system of mirror neurons for it. In this way, religious ideas like the belief that there is life after death, that if you die as a martyr, you go to paradise and are given seventy-two virgins as a reward, that unbelievers should be persecuted, and that nothing is more important than belief in God are also passed on from generation to generation and imprinted in our brain circuitry. We all know from those around us how hard it is to shed ideas that have been instilled in early development.

The evolution of modern man has given rise to five behavioural characteristics common to all cultures: language, toolmaking, music, art, and religion. Precursors of all these characteristics, except for religion, can be found in the animal kingdom. However, the evolutionary advantage of religion to humankind is clear, and it is primarily attributed to the following:

1. First, religion binds groups.
2. Traditionally, the commandments and prohibitions imposed by religions had several advantages.
3. Religious faith is a source of comfort and help at difficult times, whereas atheists have to solve their difficulties without divine aid.
4. God has the answer to everything that we do not know or understand, and belief makes you optimistic.
5. Religion takes away the fear of death- all religions promise life after death. The belief in an afterlife goes back a hundred thousand years.
6. A crucial element of religion has always been that it sanctions killing other groups in the name of one's own god. The evolutionary traits of aggression and tribalism cannot be wiped out by a few generations of centrally heated life, and that explains why xenophobia is still so widespread in our society. The whole world is full of conflicts between groups with different faiths. Since time immemorial, the "peace of God" has been imposed on others by fire and sword, which is unlikely to change soon.

Throughout history, countless people have been imprisoned and killed in the name of Christianity and of other religions. The Old Testament is awash with murders, which can stimulate. Experimental psychological studies show that reading a Bible text in which God sanctions killing raises levels of aggression – though only among believers. Nor is the New Testament all about love and peace. When Pilate washes his hands of the decision to have Christ crucified, Matthew 27:25 states that the people answered, "His blood is on us and on our children" This has been used to justify Christian anti-Semitism and has resulted in the discrimination, persecution, and murder of countless Jews, Moreover, passages like "I did not come to bring peace, but a sword" (Matthew 10.34) do not sound very peace-loving.

Blame certainly should not be confined to a single religion. Almost every religion has fundamentalist, outdated ideas proclaimed as the "truth" imposed on others, sometimes at all costs. Nor is religious extremist aggression confined to a particular faith, as witnessed the 169 deaths caused by the right-wing Christian

extremist Timothy McVeigh (the “Oklahoma City Bomber”) when he blew up the Patriarchs in Hebron by Baruch Goldstein, a Zionist extremist and racist; and the destruction of the Twin Towers on 9/11 in 2001.

As far as Islam is concerned, we can cite Honor crimes, the killing of innocent people by suicide bombers, the hacking off of right hands, and the decapitation of hostages and apostates (people who convert to another religion) as a few examples of violent actions blessed by religion. In Iran in July 2007, a man was stoned to death for adultery, and the local judge was the one who threw the first stone. And then there is violence against women, including female circumcision mutilation that still causes the deaths of large numbers of young girls every year and ruins the lives of countless women. In Sudan, almost 90 per cent of girls under ten are circumcised. The Qur’an does not prescribe female circumcision, and many Christian women in Egypt are also circumcised. However, the practice is confined to the Islamic world and is strongly endorsed by reactionary clerics, who give reasons for their stance. The Egyptian scholar Yousuf Al-Badri believes that female circumcision would solve many problems in the Western world.

Extremist organizations like the Taliban in Afghanistan, Hamas in the Palestinian territories, and Hezbollah in Lebanon rapidly gain popularity and strength. Moreover, once again, this is not specifically a Muslim problem. Under the Bush administration, fundamentalist Christians in the United States frequently stirred up public opinion with their fanatical pro-life campaign, anti-Darwinist ideas, and homophobic, Jewish right-wing extremists have been similarly active in Israel. For the time being, religions worldwide will continue to take their meaningless toll. It is a shame because there is no need to indoctrinate children with religion. Their spirituality can be put to excellent use in science and the environmental sphere or make the lives of the less privileged happier.

A high proportion of patients with psychoses are religious, as their condition often prompts an interest in spirituality. Moreover, many use religion as a way of coping with their disorder. So problems with a religious bearing always need to be looked at in the light of what is considered normal in a particular era or cultural setting. Only in this way can “purely” religious and spiritual problems be distinguished from neurological or psychiatric ones.

Certain neurological and psychiatric disorders can give rise to religious mania, at least if religion has been programmed into the brain during an individual’s youth. After an epileptic seizure, a patient can lose contact with reality, and a quarter of these psychoses take a religious form. Religious delusions can also result from mania, depression, or schizophrenia or constitute the first symptom of front temporal dementia. The murder, in 2003, of the Swedish foreign minister Anna Lindh was, for instance, committed at the “command of Jesus” by

the person living with twenty-five-year-old schizophrenia Mijailo Mijailovic, who had stopped taking his medication.

11. A Recapitulation

Before presenting the core of the proposed Political Economy Theory of Religious Fundamentalism in general, and that related to Islam and Bangladesh in specific, it would be helpful to recapitulate the article's analyses and findings. These are as follows:

First, religious fundamentalism and associated extremism may be seen as *embattled faith; withdrawal from the mainstream; creation of counter-culture; transformation of mythology into ideology; cultivation of theologies of rage, resentment and revenge; the refusal of dialogue necessary for peace and prosperity; defending beleaguered tradition using ritual truth in a globalizing world that asks for reasons*. The Islamist extremists, in their ideology, have successfully assimilated the *mythos* of religion with *logos* of reality. They aim to capture the state power through any means using this ideology.

Second, both external and internal elements of fundamentalism give birth to parochialism against religious liberalism. On the one hand, the crisis of dollar economics, the sharp growth of the petro-dollar in the world economy and its volatility, the Soviet attack on Afghanistan, the barbarian 9/11 and subsequent over-reaction in the name of "War on Terror", the *war against Iraq*, the invasion in Libya and Syria, doubts and mistrust in the people carrying the Muslim identity in the developed world, the unjust globalization, the spread of alien culture through the electronic media, and on the otherhand, rising large scale distress-destitution-deprivation and inequality of our people amidst politico-economic criminalization (which has institutionalized a "culture of plundering"), absence of 'role model' in political leadership, and increasing helplessness and frustration of the ordinary person – all these created a space for and played an immense role in the spread of intolerance and hatred using religions. These were the key opportunities that have created the increasing demand for the exponential growth of religion-based communal politics and associated extremism. Religious extremism is a supply-side response to that demand.

Third, the genesis of Islam reveals the liberal and humanistic origin of Islam in East Bengal. However, this liberal-humanistic Islam has turned into "*Political Islam*" mainly due to three major regressive transformations, associated with the emergence of the "religious doctrine-based Pakistan State" (in 1947), failure to punish the 'war criminals' (in the 1971 War of Independence), and legitimisation of communalism by replacing 'secularism' with "Islam as state religion" in the Constitution (Eighth Amendment 1988).

Fourth, the spirit of the 1971 War of liberation was to develop an exploitation-free equitable economy, institute a secular mindset among people, and establish an enlightened society. However, from the point of view of structural transformation, the balance sheet of the last 40 years (1975-2015) shows that there has not been any meaningful progressive pro-poor change in the society and economy, which complies with the spirit of the 1971 Liberation War. On the contrary, the economy-society-culture-politics has taken the shape of “For the 1%, of the 1%, by the 1%” through the sharp rise of “rent-seekers” on the one hand (who have managed to let government and politics appear subservient to them), and rising inequality and multidimensional poverty among the majority (in a country of 160 million people only one million criminals have trapped 159 million helpless people). The gap between the people’s aspirations and the reality of unmet aspirations has been vast. It is ever-increasing, a particular reality that has created the most fertile ground for the rise and nourishing of religious fundamentalism and extremism.

Fifth, using ‘democratic deficit’ in an equi-strength bipolar democracy (with Bangladesh Awami League and Bangladesh Nationalist Party) coupled with rising inequality and mistrust towards traditional politics – the leading religion-based party, Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh (which opposed the 1971 independence, officially) penetrated the mind-set of a sizeable proportion of the population. This party slowly became a factor in electoral politics. The poor and lower and mid-middle class people comprising 83 per cent of the total population of Bangladesh form a solid basis towards religiosity and “intellectual” support group of Jamaat-e-Islam (or, for that matter, any organized Islamic religious-based political party) as well as the rise of religious fundamentalism.

Sixth, the mainstream Islamist party – Jamaat-e-Islami, Bangladesh, through various means, has created an “economy within the economy” (i.e., the economics of fundamentalism), a “government within the government”, and a “state within the state”. Islamist forces have developed an interrelated triangular circuit in which Jamaat-e-Islam acts as the corporate Head Quarters. The other two hands of the triangle are 132 Islamist extremist organizations, the economy of fundamentalism, and 231 non-government organizations with many trusts and foundations. The only aim of this triangle is to “capture state power using religion as a pretext”.

Seventh, “Economic fundamentalism” (i.e., economic and social enterprises own and run by Islamic religious forces) is vital in Bangladesh. The estimated net profit of economic fundamentalism in 2015 would be about USD 2.4 billion. The highest share of that profit, 27.8 per cent, comes from financial institutions,

followed by NGOs trusts and foundations (19.4%), trading (10.6%), health-related enterprises (10%), educational institutions (9.4%), real estate business (8%), media and IT business (7.4%), transport business (7.4%). The relative size of this economy of fundamentalism may not be very high (equivalent to 8.63% of the government's annual development budget) compared to the overall economy. However, danger lies in the following: as against the average of 5-7 per cent growth rate of the national economy, their economy grows at the rate of 9.1 per cent; their economy's total cumulative net profit during the last 40 years (1975-2015) would be about USD 25 billion. In the last ten years, between 2005 and 2015, the annual average growth rate in population was 1.175 per cent, the enrolment of students at the religious schools (Aliya and Quomi Madrassas) was 1.32 per cent compared to 1.18 per cent in the mainstream schools (Primary plus Secondary schools and Colleges). However, for Quomi madrassas- the places of intellectual breeding grounds for religious extremism- the annual increase in students exceeded all, reaching 1.79 per cent. The Quomi students constitute 15.7 per cent of all students and 55.9 per cent of all madrassa students in Bangladesh (and the trend shows upward movement). All these are happening in a context when inequality is rising: during the last ten years (between 2005 and 2015), the Gini coefficient reached 0.482 in 2016 (from 0.467 in 2005), and the Palma ratio reached 2.92 in 2016 (from 2.62 in 2005). The 'economy of fundamentalism' run by religious politically ideology politics Scrutiny of our estimations presented in Table 2 would be adequate to conclude 'dangerous time ahead' attributed to the economy of Islamist Fundamentalism in support 500,000 full-time cadres in politics using 10 per cent of the net profit; they use their economic and political power for placing their own people in strategic positions; they can manage to get on average 15,000 votes in a parliamentary constituency (an average of 75,000 votes needed to win a seat); they provide funding support to conduct day-to-day political activity; they funded huge threat-gathering in Dhaka city on 5 May 2013 by the Hefazat-e-Islam; they give fund for running arms training centres; they provide funding support to many of the 132 Islamist extremist organizations.

Eighth, there are at least 132 Islamist militant organizations in Bangladesh. Some of them operate at local, sub-district and district levels, some at divisional level, some at the national level, and a few beyond the boundary of Bangladesh. These 'Jihadi' organizations have passed through four phases, the 4th phase-2013 and onward may be denoted as "Militancy in Active Form". In other words, the current phase of 'Jihad' of Islamist extremists in Bangladesh falls between '*Ribat*' (meaning small scale clashes) and '*Kilal*' (meaning frontal war); and other things remaining the same, it falls closer to '*Kilal*' than to '*Ribat*'. Two of the already-

banned outfits, the *Jagrata Muslim Janata* (JMB) and the Ansarullah Bangla Team (ABT), are the two most dangerous ones having connections with al-Qaeda and IS and trying to form a single platform of all Islamist extremist outfits in Bangladesh. Their plan to establish Islami Shariah based State Bangladesh, Khelafat, by 2024 coincides precisely with al-Qaeda's master plan of establishing Khelafat in Muslim dominated countries by 2024.

Ninth, it is not possible to extirpate the Islamist-extremism immediately because, within a few days' time-period, it is not possible to break the economic and social foundations (both local and international) on which it is grounded. The accelerated implementation of a "damage minimizing strategy" and a "risk reduction strategy simultaneously" is possible now. As a short term solution, the "damage minimization strategy" may be to pursue a set of doable at a time: (1) To arrange a third-party audit to uncover the Jamaat-extremist connection with the economy of fundamentalism, i.e., to uncover the pathways and nature of financial transactions of the fundamentalists. The outcomes may include nationalisation, confiscation, legal transfer, changing management, changing Board etc.; (2) By speedy trial to execute the punishment of those who made crime against humanity and war-crime in 1971, and are also the god-father of Islamist extremism; (3) To publish-circulate in the mass media whatever is known to the government about the source of funding and arms and explosives of the extremists; (4) To stop the channel of money and arms of the extremists; (5) To confiscate the wealth of extremists; and use the same for the 1971 martyrs, crippled, leading insolvent life, and for those who died due to fundamentalism – extremism; (6) To arrest and give exemplary punishment to them all who are directly-indirectly related with extremist activities; (7) To identify those who, within the government, are the promoters of religious extremism; (8) To strengthen the movement to ban religion-based communal politics; (9) To launch profound awareness raising efforts for the mass people to unveil the real face-aims-objectives of the extremists so that people consciously and spontaneously participate in this process. There may be only one long-term solution - that is, intending to establish a secular mindset, it needs to implement the political promises, including the removal of all sources of economic, social and political inequality.

Tenth, Religious extremism is locally manifested, whereas it holds the status of a global issue. Moreover, global partners must be proactively engaged in countering religious extremism, in which "Risk Reduction Strategy" and "Damage Minimizing Strategy" should be prioritised. Keeping this in view, the rich country governments, in countering religious extremism, may consider the following: They need to (1) Review the weaknesses of the policies on "War on

Terror”; (2) Re-find out and address the root causes of global terrorism including religious extremism; (3) Think more about the complex social-economic-cultural-diplomatic solution rather than the military solution of countering religious extremism; and (4) Take proactive initiative towards activating regional forums in countering religious extremism.

Eleventh, the contemporary world (especially after the fall of socialism in the Soviet Union) is essentially a unipolar one guided by the U.S. dominated Unitarian system of imperialist order, which subordinates all internal factors (and causes). It leads to a sort of global structure where external and internal causal forces form a single cause-form with two apparent differences; internal forces are subjugated to the prime external force — the U.S. imperial ambition aiming at establishing absolute ownership and control over global vital strategic resources, namely land, water, energy-fuel-minerals, and space. The emerging China-factor will change soon, many facets including worsening the situation of religion-based extremism.

The potential catastrophe emanating from the economics of fundamentalism and politics of religious extremism can be overcome only through enlightened political and civic movements guided by courageous leadership coupled with substantive public actions. Such actions should give an institutional shape to democratic values, an enlightened and secular mindset, and equity in distributing public resources and development benefits.

12. Political Economy of Religious Fundamentalism: Core of the Theory

In the emergence and development of religious fundamentalism and fundamentalist militancy, the internal causes and factors are essential. However, these are not the main reason — rather the “appearance of the cause” (in the language of philosophy — “appearances of things”). The external causes, that is, in a unipolar world, the main reason is the originator of the imperialist system-US imperialism’s monopoly on the global fundamental-strategic resources (land, water, energy-power-mineral-sky-space); Therefore, the multidimensional aspects of the causes and consequences of the emergence and development of fundamentalism and fundamentalist militancy have been explained and analysed in this article.

In developing the Political Economic Theory of Religious Fundamentalism, it is necessary to keep in mind that there are many ‘unknown unknowns’ in life, particularly in social phenomena and social-humanitarian sciences. The core of the Political Economy Theory of Religious Fundamentalism (and associated extremism and militancy) would be as follows:

Today's world (especially after the formal collapse of the socialist socio-economic system in the Soviet Union) is essentially a unipolar world, which is governed/guided/ruled by a Unitarian system of imperialism; the lord of that imperialism is the US imperialism which has subjugated all kinds of internal fundamentals factors-reasons in all countries. These mergers have now created a system at the global level where it is not logical to make such a distinction between external and internal; these are just two internal forms of the same global structure, where the seemingly internal form is, in fact, the subjugated form of the external force. Moreover, the main force, in this case, is the external power: US imperialism, whose main imperialist goal is to establish absolute ownership and monopoly control over the four essential and strategic resources of the world: (1) land, (2) water, (3) energy-power-mineral resources, and (4) the space. To sustain and develop this process of the unitarian system of global imperialism — the epicentre imperialism will follow all possible ways-methods whatever it can take - be it "religion", be it "activities intended for change of state structure and power", be it "change of international law", maybe "UN reform", "regional alliances formed or disbanded", maybe "more dominance in the media", maybe somewhere "creating a state of war" or directly "fighting", maybe the practice of more than one of these activities simultaneously.

This theory may seem that internal elements play a secondary role in developing religion-based fundamentalism and related militancy. It may not be. For example, to keep the Saudi monarchy alive, the Saudi state power may indulge not only religion, if necessary, may or may not patronize-indulge religious militancy; but to establish their monopoly power and control over the four primary global strategic resources if the imperialist superpowers think that the fall of monarchy has become a necessity what will happen then? Maybe both sides will use the same religion in different ways, or the two sides will use the two religions differently, or there will be a big war or overthrowing the government through a coup will establish a 'good apple' and so on. The same is true of many other countries (of which there is ample evidence in history) when the state power, even ostensibly speaking of 'democracy' and 'secularism', use 'religion' to stay in power; All these we now see with open eyes when the religious sentiments of people irrespective of religion are being used arbitrarily (which has happened in the past, will happen in the future). From what I have said so far, there will be no deviation from my main point: that is, the root cause is exploitation, the system of exploitation between man and man, the system of which, to survive, must establish single absolute ownership and monopoly authority over the four primary strategic resources of the world. I am well aware that most of those who talk about

the origin and development of religion-based fundamentalism and fundamentalist militancy, who practice knowledge, do not agree with what I have said so far. Because most people think that the issue is purely internal or think external issues are unnecessary. These “proponents in favour of smearing” are incapable of grasping the significance of the political economy of fundamentalism.

Finally, considering the changing nature of society and knowledge dynamics, it is imperative to conduct in-depth multidisciplinary research in social sciences, including economics, to discover the General Theory of Political Economy of Religious Fundamentalism. It is most likely that such a theory proposed in this article would add significant value to the whole endeavour. However, at this embryonic stage of the development of the Political Economy Theory of Religious Fundamentalism, it may be helpful to keep in mind Philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer’s thoughts about seeking and establishing truth: “All truths passes through three stages. First, it is ridiculed. Second, it is violently opposed. Third, it is accepted as being self-evident.”

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