Political Economy of Fundamentalism in Bangladesh

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Abstract: The genesis of Islam reveals liberal and humanistic origin of Islam in East Bengal. But this liberal-humanistic Islam has turned into “Political Islam” mainly due to three major regressive transformations associated with the emergence of “religious doctrine-based Pakistan State” (in 1947), failure in punishing the ‘war criminals’ (in 1971 War of Independence), and legitimizing communalism by replacing ‘secularism’ by “Islam as state religion” in the Constitution (eighth amendment 1988). The failure of the State in satisfying basic needs of the people, growing criminalization of economy and politics, growing inequality in society, increasing youth unemployment, communalization of culture and education, lack of people’s confidence on mainstream political (democratic) leadership, external environment—all contributed to the growth of Islamist extremism in Bangladesh. Religious fundamentalism, in the process, has gained momentum to shape organized ‘political Islam’, which intends to capture the state power by force. The religious fundamentalist forces have successfully assimilated the mythos of religion with logos of reality, and pursuing their aim of capturing the state power by using religion as pretext through an well organized economic power based political process. In so doing, the fundamentalists have created “an economy within the economy”, and “a state within the state”. They have adequate economic strength (from micro to macro levels) to sustain their political organizations. The economics of fundamentalism, in the narrow sense of the term, can be explained in terms of enterprises ranging from large financial institutions to household level micro credit, from mosques and madrasas to news media and IT, from nation wide trading enterprises to local level NGOs. The estimated amount of annual net profit generated by these enterprises would be US$250 million. All these economic enterprises are run by ideologically motivated and professionally competent persons. At least 10% of their net profits are being used to finance political organization, which is sufficient to fund salary of 500,000 full timers in Islamic fundamentalist politics. Taking advantage of their economic as well as political power, they set their own representatives in key strategic positions in the government and autonomous bodies. The relative strength of economics of fundamentalism in Bangladesh can be traced in the fact that its annual net profit is equivalent to 6% of the government’s annual development budget, and the annual growth rate of the economy controlled by the fundamentalists is higher (7.5%-9%) than that of the national economy (5%-6%). Therefore, Islamist fundamentalism in Bangladesh, as a beleaguered tradition and embattled faith is a refusal of dialogue in globalizing world that asks for reasons and whose peace and continuity depend on it. The crisis, 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 aim at giving an institutional shape to democratic values, secular mind-set, and equity in distribution of public resources and benefits of development.

Economics of Fundamentalism – Essence and linkages

The term “fundamentalism” – as religions reaction against scientific and secular culture – may not be a perfect one, but it is a useful label for movements that, despite substantial differences, bear a strong family resemblance (Armstrong 2001). 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 mainstream; creation of counter culture; transformation of mythology in to ideology; cultivation of theologies of rage, resentment and revenge; refusal of dialogue necessary for peace and continuity; defending beleaguered tradition using ritual truth in globalizing world that asks for reasons (see box).
The **economics of fundamentalism** is relatively a new area of research not yet adequately addressed in the political economy literature. This paper is not aimed at defining **economics of fundamentalism per se** as an independent economic system or an independent mode of production. The purpose here is to provide an analysis of the economic strengths of the religious fundamentalist forces in Bangladesh within a political economy framework. In accomplishing the analysis, the historical reason for substantive regression from "Humanistic Islam" into "Political Islam" in Bangladesh have been traced, and the essence of economic and social foundations for the emergence and growth of religious extremism and economics of fundamentalism have been identified. And finally, attempts have been made to understand the political limits to growth of **economics of fundamentalism** and associated religious-communal politics in Bangladesh.

**Economics of fundamentalism** can be viewed as a concentrated expression of religion-based communal politics aimed at **capturing the state power** using religion as pretext. It runs contrary to secular approach to people, smothering and decimating the free, unfettered outlook. It has launched a vicious onslaught on the spirit of secularism that was embedded in the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh in 1972 following the Liberation War-1971. The act of satisfying people's hopes and aspirations turned out to be a fiasco. At the same time, erosion of a secular democratic mind-set also cropped up. Both these two factors, besides encouraging the growth of fundamentalism and its economic agents and interests, have given birth to the institutions that turned favorable to their expanded reproduction. Consequently, the **economics of fundamentalism** came in to being.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objective meaning of fundamentalism</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Religious fundamentalism</strong> is a form of militant piety in religion. Fundamentalism is an embattled faith. It is beleaguered tradition defended in the traditional way – by reference to ritual truth – in a globalizing world that asks for reasons. Fundamentalism is evident in both great monotheisms (Christianity, Islam, Judaism) and in other religions (Buddhism, Hinduism, even in Confucianism etc). The Muslim and Jewish fundamentalisms are not much concerned with doctrine, which is an essentially Christian preoccupation. 'Fundamentalisms' all follow a certain pattern – they are embattled forms of spirituality, which have emerged as a response to a perceived crisis. They are engaged in a 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 by means of a selective retrieval of certain doctrines and practices of the past. To avoid contamination, they often withdraw from mainstream society to create a counterculture, yet fundamentalists are not impractical dreamers. They have absorbed the pragmatic rationalism of modernity, and, under the guidance of charismatic leaders, they refine these &quot;fundamentals&quot; so as to create an ideology that provides the faithful with a plan of action. Fundamentalists – by turning the mythos of their religion into logos and by transforming their complex mythology into a streamlined ideology – cultivate theologies of rage, resentment, and revenge. Fundamentalism is a refusal of dialogue in a world whose peace and continuity depend on it.</td>
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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 polarization of the world, and the rise of unjust globalization – all contributed to the growth of religion-based fundamentalism in the world. **Imperialism** has played a major role in the speedy rise of fundamentalism in some parts of the world. This might be evident, among others from the pertinent question: Who created Talebanism, Molla Omar, Bin Laden?

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 profit equation – both economic and political – has acted as the key determinant. Where and how imperialism will play its role will depend on their own political economic equation with their self interest – where in ultimate analysis, economic considerations play the vital role. Capital will not hesitate to risk its life if there is a chance of 300% profit earning. Therefore, the rise of economics of fundamentalism is obvious, and such religious extremism is compatible with the evolution of free-market-mediated increasing
alienation and crisis in identity. Likewise if certain form of fundamentalism turns out as an obstacle to the growth of imperialism, the same will be replaced by another form of communalism – this is also noticeable. In the present era, the political economy of oil and gas, geo-economics of water, economics of war, economics of command over space, political economy of establishing command over the global market (in the name of so called free market and globalization) – these are some of the broad areas of bondages between fundamentalism 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\(^1\), the sharp growth of petro dollar in the world economy and its volatility, the attack of Soviet Union on Afghanistan, the barbarian 9/11 and subsequent over-reaction by the name of “attack on terrorism”, doubt and mistrust in people carrying Muslim identity in the developed world, the war against Iraq\(^2\) – the second largest reservoir of oil in the world and occupation of the country, the spread of alien culture through electronic media in the name of globalization, on the other hand, large scale distress-destitution-deprivation of our people amidst politico-economic criminalization and increasing helplessness of common 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, which have created the increasing demand for growth of religion-based communal politics. The consequent emergence of \textit{economics of fundamentalism} can be seen as a supply side response to that demand. And, supply creates its own demand.

\textbf{Islam in East-Bengal: historically liberal, humanistic and secular}

Most of the written histories pertaining to the evolution of Islam in East Bengal (now Bangladesh) are incomplete and euphemistic. They are not based on empirical evidences, and lack knowledge-based inferences. Objective analyses of materials of historiography, such as geography, changes of river morphology, emergence and evolution of agrarian civilization, 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 evolution of Islam in East-Bengal. The relevant historiography is rather weak in this respect.

The origin and evolution of Islam in East-Bengal – in the writings of historians – are available in four lines of historiography of Islamization in East Bengal – 
\textit{Immigration, Sword, Patronage, and Social Liberation}. None of these historiographic lines are complete in terms of empirical substantiation. The pertinent issues without satisfactory answers include: Who

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textbf{\textit{Crisis of dollar economics has many dimensions. Dollarisation of economy has led Latin America, South-East Asia, and many developing countries of South Asia to crisis situation (Stigliz 2002). In this regard special mention may be made that United States is the most powerful but highly indebted country of the world. Imports of United States are a few times larger than its exports. To make up the gap, US economy has to depend to a large extent on foreign lenders. Current account deficit of United States, is on average US $ 500 billion a year. In this process, indebtedness of USA stands at $2 trillion at present, which is equivalent to 20\% of their GDP. At present US economy has to repay on average $200 billion with a rate of interest of 3\% per annum. If the indebtedness continues at the present rate indebtedness of USA in the year 2015 will stand at 67\% of its GDP. Without new taxes imposed on US citizens and/or without capturing other’s wealth, the budget deficit of USA will go on increasing.}}
  \item \textbf{\textit{War, in most cases, is a profitable business. It is to note that, USA spends more on military expenditure ($375 billion per year) than rest of the world combined together. Economist Nordhause may make rigorous exercise and say that USA may suffer a loss of $200 billion to $3,000 billion in Iraq war. In fact, this loss is not a real loss. Milton Friedman has put up a long list and stated that the war will benefit the world and world economy will boom. Lots of armaments are being sold. The business for reconstruction of Postwar Iraq has got momentum. Generally after a major war, business on arms and ammunition goes on robust way in the third world. This is also taking place and if nowhere else this is taking place in countries with kingship in “good autocratic country”. This may be kept in mind, that most of the imperialist countries are energy dependent and energy security of those countries constitute a key determinant of long-run development. The best routes of oil geography are oil of the central Asia, oil route of Afghanistan, oil of Iraq etc. ‘War for Oil’ is central to US strategy in Iraq. Iraq has the second largest oil reserves in the world, and Iraqi oil is very easily accessible and cheap. ‘If you control Iraq, you are in a very strong 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. This has nothing in particular to do with access to the oil for import into the United States. It’s about control of the oil... In the Middle East, the United States wants control’. (Chomsky 2005 : 5-7).}}
\end{itemize}
are the immigrants? When and how did the immigrants arrive? When and how was Islam transformed into mass religion in this country with the power of sword? History tells us that, even the most conservative Mogul emperor Awrangazeb (1658-1707) did not encourage or exert pressure for religious purposes. Akbar (1556-1605) abolished discriminatory land revenue system, banned activities offensive to Hindus, e.g., 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 etc.

In fact, in the subcontinent as a whole, there is an inverse relationship between the degree of Muslim political penetration and the degree of Islamization. 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, which were the center of Muslim rule for about 450 years, and yet the Muslims formed a smaller proportion of the population as compared to that in the adjacent districts of Dinajpur, Rajshahi, and Nadia (Census of India 1901).

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. Even they did not support any religious persecution. On the other hand, they kept the place of religious activity – Tomb, Mosque, Madrasa, etc – 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 grant. This implies that they involved people in economic activities, primarily in agriculture. Side by side, Sufis put more emphasis on activities related to rendering humane services. They never persuaded people much to accept Islam. Their main motto was to, “service to the best of the creations”, that is, ‘service to human person (Ashraful Maklukath) is religion’. There is no evidence whatsoever indicating that the Sufis in Bengal actually indulged in the destruction of temples or places of worship of other religions.

The Sufis and their contemporary religious persons brought about admixture of religious ideas with economic development and agricultural production (of course analysis of city-based aristocracy “Ashraf” thesis is different). From the writings of the Sufis and Devotees, such evidence is there that ‘Allah sent Adam to Sandip Island’. Gabriel at the instruction of Allah asked Adam to go to Mecca to build the original Kaba. After Kaba was built Gabriel gave him a plough and 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”.

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

Sources of Islamist extremism – Outcome of contemporary regressive transformation

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 major disaster in the socio-political life in Bengal. It was the time, when at one stage, in the process of anti-colonial movements, a move came to establish a State based on religion, meaning thereby creation of Pakistan for

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3 The Rise of Islam and Bengal Frontier-1206 to 1760’ by Richard Eton quoted from Saiyid Sultan’s epic poem “Nabi Bangsa.”
the Muslims and Hindustan for the Hindus. This widely known “two nation theory” can be denoted as the first formal basis for the formation of “Political Islam” in Bengal.

The Sufis and the Ulamaas of the liberal humanism of Islam could not oppose the division of the United India on the basis of religion. This regressive transformation against the main religious course did not take place all on a sudden. Specific aggressive courses of religion (such as Wahabi, etc.) were in place. As a result, a negative transformation of humanistic welfarism of Sufi’s-Ulamaa’s Islam took pace. What was liberal, humanistic and secular turned into parochial aggressiveness. The object was to capture state power through use of “political Islam” in narrow selfish interest. With the establishment of 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 1965 Indo-Pak war, the feudal-army rulers of that time did not take even twenty four hours time to level all the Hindus of East Pakistan into Hindustani. They proclaimed ‘Enemy Property Act’, which implies that all the Hindus residing in Pakistan are the enemies⁴. Such religion-based communalism supported by the state was never ever in evidence in the history of East Bengal.

The religion-based division of the country took place without the informed consent of the people (irrespective of Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist or Christian). They were not involved in the process of division of the country (the so-called referendum was just a tokenism). People’s opinion was not respected. That is why at that time there was bluffing slogan like, “Biri (or Bidi – a locally made cigarette) in the hand, beetle nut in the mouth, we’ll establish Pakistan through fighting”⁵. On the other hand, people with vision declared “this independence is a blunt lie, because millions are hungry”⁶. The country was divided on the basis of religion (no one felt the need to seek opinion of mass people). Largely due to 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 relatively a large country like India, confluence of various religions and from the very beginning the politico-economic evolution of equality and equity were given recognition Constitutionally. In addition, both democracy and media have played critical role.

During the whole period of Pakistan (1947 to 1971), religion-based communalism was utilized in conducting the state affairs and the socio cultural activities. For overcoming any socio-political crisis religion was (mis) used. They would say, ‘Islam in danger’, wherever there was any problem. For maintaining military rule and autocracy “Islam in danger” was the only slogan. Finally, this same slogan was used against our liberation war, in 1971. Slogan “Islam in danger” (Islam Khatre me hai) was used when Punjabi, Sindhi, Baluch army were brought from West Pakistan to East Pakistan to fight the Freedom Fighters. Of course, many of the Pak-Army witnessed a different situation in East Pakistan. The same slogan “Islam in danger” was used in this country while forming so called “peace committee”. The Albadar, Alshams, Rajakar, etc. were formed with a handful of Bengali Muslim collaborators who were against the liberation of this country. These war criminals were certain that the Bengalis imbued with ideas of liberation war would be defeated by the joint effort of the powerful Pakistan military and these local collaborators – Rajakars, Albadar, Alshams. But the opposite happened. At the price of huge blood, we earned our independence. But we failed to punish the war criminals who were opposed to our liberation war. This has played a

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⁴ Because of enactment of this inhuman communal act in 1965 and its continuation till today (as “Vested Property Act”) about 6 million people belonging to Hindu community have lost 2.6 million acres of land property (details see, Barkat A et.al, 2008).

⁵ “Hat me biri mu me pan – Larke lenge Pakistan” – the causes behind popularity of this slogan can be traced as a result of interplay of two factors, namely about 200 years of colonialism and exploitation of the feudal lords in East Bengal, most of who were Hindus.

⁶ “Yee Azadi Jhuta Hai Lakho Insan Bhukha Hai”.
decisive role in bolstering their audacity. Those religion-traders (they were not as religious as the Sufis and the Ulamaas) and a handful of their followers are the representatives of extreme religious communalism and economics of fundamentalism in Bangladesh. In this country, this was a great distortion of religion. This may be termed the second phase of regressive transformation in Islam of East Bengal. In this country, 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 religion-based act of terrorism of 1971 on a larger scale with a deeper base. This regressive transformation got impetus and crystallized with the legitimization of communalism in Constitution when ‘secularism’ was replaced by “Islam will be State religion” (Article 2A, 8\textsuperscript{th} amendment).

Communalism in Pakistan not only worked as a basis for forming the State, this gained in strength in a big way afterwards. For freeing the people from discrimination of two-economies, independence of Bangladesh was declared in 1971. People of this country dreamt of a welfare state, where freedom of choice would be there, 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 non-communal environment and where secularism would evolve as a state principle. The Constitution of independent Bangladesh State makes such promises publicly. Such a state also meets the demand for fundamental rights of equality of men and women, irrespective of religions and caste. In real sense, the difference between the promise and reality was so stark that possibility existed for spread of economics of fundamentalism and related politics of religious extremism.

**Economic and social basis of economics of fundamentalism**

The foundation of economics of fundamentalism is not weak in Bangladesh. This is because although feudal relationship of production has formally come to an end in Bangladesh economy, the traditional feudal psychology has not been abolished on the one hand, and capitalist relationship of production has not yet evolved, on the other. Various types of worse form of capital has evolved, which does not play a conducive role towards productive investment. This worse form of vulture capitalism is much more conducive to the production of “briefcase capitalism” (commission agency) than strongly-based home grown industrial capitalism. This capitalism is more interested in “real estate and mall-centric economy” than in “productive industrial-agriculture center economy”. Therefore, from structural point of view, the system is not conducive to accelerated generation of employment in a labor surplus economy, and thereby, not conducive to poverty and inequality reduction\(^7\). Also, such free market economy is never poor-friendly. The so-called free market within the context of globalized monopoly capitalism has not been instrumental in developing national capitalism in Bangladesh. To the contrary, that has acted as a hindrance, which has also fueled the rise of communal politics and Islamic extremism in Bangladesh.

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\(^7\) Economic idea about poverty is mostly narrowly defined one indicating income poverty or food poverty (measured in terms of direct calorie intake or cost of basic needs). Poverty, which creates space for fundamentalism should be viewed in a broader sense as a complex interrelated domain of the following: income poverty, poverty due to hunger, 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 lack of 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 marginalization (e.g., among religious minorities, indigenous peoples, poor women, slum dwellers, char people, rickshaw-van pullers etc.), and poverty of mind set (details see Barkat 2006b).
From the point of view of structural transformation, during the last 40 years (1971-2012) of independence there has not been any fundamental progressive “pro-poor” changes in the economy of Bangladesh. It cannot be said that the spirit of human welfare of independence has been realized. The basic objective of independence was to create healthy people – healthy nation without divide, imbued with the spirit of liberation. The gap between people’s aspiration and reality has been wide and ever increasing. This widening of gaps between the aspiration and reality has also helped to grow and nourish religious fundamentalism in Bangladesh.

It is true that the independent Bangladesh has emerged as result of struggle against discrimination in two economies. But the trend of evolution of last 40 years shows a clear division of the country of 150 million into two parts: In the first part are the powerful people of small groups, their number is no more than 1 million (including family members). In the second part are the large numbers of people who are powerless and whose number will be 149 million. Due to machination of politics and economics a situation has been created, where 149 million powerless people exist against only 1 million powerful people. These 149 million people are basically helpless, deprived, destituted and distressed. In real sense, there was no conscious socio-political effort from the side of the governance quarters to make these large numbers of powerless people in to a powerful ones or empowering them by way of inclusion of the excluded. On the contrary, multi-faceted efforts are on to increase the power of the powerful people in the society. It appears that this trend will continue for long. The overall politico-economic equation in the society indicates to this direction.

There is no doubt about it that majority of the powerless people in Bangladesh – whatever is reflected in the “statistical economy” of the government relating to index of employment and standard of living – lead their life in extreme sufferings and misery. The relative share of the poor people in total national household income is on the decline, however inequality is rising. At the same time, the relative share of the rich people is increasing – this is officially recognized. In parallel, a self-destructing culture of plundering and culture of secrecy (opposite to transparency) have made their strong roots in the sectors of economy, politics, administration, education, and culture. Black money, violence, illegal arms, muscle power, illegal gratification, kickback, speed money, corruption, mal-administration, oppression-repression, etc. are the determinants of culture of plundering. All these contribute to the rise of economics of fundamentalism and to 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 1 million criminals have trapped 149 million helpless people in the framework of institutionalized criminalization. A powerful criminal minority, and a powerless majority (the victims of criminalization) – these two trends are clearly in existence in Bangladesh. The rise and development of political economy of fundamentalism during the last 40 years depict a scenario, which makes it clear that whatever is against human welfare and human development is on the rise (see Balance Sheet in Table 1). Everything including human relationship has turned into market commodity and that of a distorted market. In the absence of patriotic and farsighted leadership the politico-economic base for production and people’s welfare has not expanded.

During the last 40 years economic criminalization has acted as a powerful catalyst to criminalize all spheres of politics and society. We have attained a sort of perpetuating exclusion of the excluded situation; an environment aggravating the alienation process of the excluded; a scenario which has created conditions for more active denial to address the issues pertaining to the broadening of human choices for full-life (to ensure five types of freedom people shall enjoy). The developmental balance sheet (Table 1) shows vividly that we are now caught in a trap of culture of plundering wherein the overall environment favors everything which is against human development, which is fully in congruence with the
interest of criminalization. The last forty years’ balance sheet depicts a clear tendency: The status of all indicators conducive to human development is getting worse, and indicators associated with criminalization trap are getting stronger, and thereby, limiting the scopes 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 more strength): One economy is represented by only one million people who are most powerful (in the steering wheel, irrespective of who holds the formal power), and the other economy is represented by the unempowered majority, 149 million people – the excluded, deprived and distressed (According to article 7 of our Constitution, “All powers in the Republic belong to the People”).

The analysis of the type of development that Bangladesh passed through in last forty years (Table 1) shows that whatever good positive aspects will benefit the people has not increased, rather it has declined and whatever negative aspects were bad for the country has in fact increased expeditiously. During last 40 years some people became owners of unlimited wealth and larger section of the people have become poorer (the hapless – alienated people look for shelter). Sources of unearned income increased at a high rate, but pomp and show have gone up and sufferings of various kinds of the larger section of the people have expanded. Multi-storied buildings have been erected, but side by side the number of slums has gone up; government’s real allocations for welfare of people have declined, and side by side un-productive expenditures have gone up; donor interferences has increased and side by side local initiatives have gone down and government allocation has gone up in unproductive sector. The distance between the public and public servants has increased. Election expenditure has gone up but good governance and efficacy of elected institutions have gone down; power of black money has gone up and politician’s respect for people has gone down, and discrimination between rich and poor has increased. Government’s real allocation in basic education has gone down. Poverty-related diseases have increased and real expenditure on people’s health has gone down, and efficacy of government health sector has eroded. Trading on religion increased, number of Pirs, Fakirs, astrologers, fortune-tellers, violence in the name of religion – all have gone up, and love for people of different religion has declined. Culture of rationality and science, secular behavior and enlightened mind-set have tarnished. In other words, cultural communalism has deepened. Side by side, communalism in education has increased the strength of economic power of fundamentalism. During 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, enrolments in primary schools have doubled but those in Dakhil Madrasas increased thirteen times; per head public expenditure on students of the government middle class educational institutions is Tk. 3,000 as against Tk.5,000 in Madrasa sector. Therefore, the “intellectual” basis for rise of religious extremism is in full-swing operation. At the same time, in any future reform of the religious educational system, this may specially be considered that majority of the Madrasa students have come from poor or low-income families.
reflecting the trends in socio-
unexplored subject so far) indicates an overall deteriorating situation of the poor and middle-
class structure in both rural and urban Bangladesh. This changing class structure is highly-
anti-economic and anti-political, where the rise of religious extremism and economics of fundamentalism.
The nature of such transformation of socio-economic class structure in Bangladesh (an-
exunexplored subject so far) indicates an overall deteriorating situation of the poor and middle-
class, and concentration of assets and power among a few rich. The following features-
reflecting the trends in socio-economic class structure, which explain the real reason(s) for-
rise of religious extremism and economics of fundamentalism, are in order (Barkat 2012):

1. Out of 150 million people in Bangladesh, 98.9 million (66%) are poor, 47 million (31.3%)-
represent middle class, and the rest, 4.1 million (2.7%) are rich. In 1984, the number of-
poor people was 60 million (60% of total population) i.e., the number of poor people has-
increased by 39 million in last 25 years. This rising number of poor and increasing-
inequality – an outcome of failure in the national development – constitute a solid basis-
towards religiosity and religious extremism in Bangladesh.
Table 2: Dynamics of socio-economic classes in Bangladesh: 1984-2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rural/Urban</th>
<th>Poor (low asset)</th>
<th>Middle Class</th>
<th>Rich (upper class)</th>
<th>All</th>
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<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
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<tr>
<td>(land ownership based)</td>
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<tr>
<td>% rural population</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>16.9</td>
<td>16</td>
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<tr>
<td>Population (million)</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>80.9</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>18.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
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<td>(asset valuation based)</td>
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<tr>
<td>% total population</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td>Population (million)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Rural + Urban)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% total population</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>16.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population (million)</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>98.9</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>25.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Abul Barkat 2013.

Notes on methodology: There is no officially accepted (by the government’s statistics office) methodology to identify socio-economic classes in Bangladesh. In order to understand the dynamics of changes in the social structure in Bangladesh, the author has devised a methodology to quantify the population into different socio-economic classes. For classification of rural population household land ownership and for urban population amount of asset valuation has been used as criterion. The following classification formula has been used: Poor or less asset group are those having up to 100 decimals of land (in rural) and total valuation of asset less than Tk. 0.5 million (in urban); lower middle class was denoted as those having 101-249 decimals of land ownership (in rural) and asset valuation of Tk. 0.5-0.9 million (in urban); mid-middle class comprises those households having 250-499 decimals of own land (in rural) and asset valuation of Tk. 1-2.9 million (in urban); upper middle class was denoted as those having 500-749 decimals of land ownership (in rural) and asset valuation of Tk. 3-4.9 million (in urban), finally, the rich (upper class) was denoted as those households having 750 decimals or more of land ownership (in rural) and valuation of asset of Tk.5 million or more (in urban).

2. Poor are disproportionately highly concentrated in the rural areas compared to the urban: 82% poor live in the rural and 18% in the urban areas. Among the rural households 60% are landless, 65% do not have access to electricity in household (one should count that electricity is not just light it is enlightenment)\(^8\), and 65% do not have access to public health system; and urbanization in Bangladesh is basically “slumization” or ruralization of urban life without concomitant industrialization and with growing informal sectors.\(^9\) This nature of poverty in both rural and urban areas forms a fertile ground for religious extremism and associated activities.

3. During the last 25 years (1984-2010), while the total population has increased by 50% the population in the ‘poor’ category has increased by about 65%. Therefore, it is most likely, that the growth in poverty-led fundamentalism should have been high in the last 25 years.

4. Among the current 47 million middle class population, 25.4 million (54% of middle class) are in the lower middle class, 14.6 million (31%) are in the mid-middle class, and the rest 7 million (15%) are in the upper middle class. This middle class – especially the unstable lower and mid-middle classes – forms the intellectual drivers of fundamentalism and the key to the ‘success’ of religious militant activities. In this connection, the following elements in the class dynamics showing rising inequality are worth analysis:

   a. About 78% of the total incremental population during the last 25 years can be attributed to the incremental population in the ‘poor’ category, and 15%, mostly due to downward shift of the past-lower-middle class.

\(^8\) Details about impact of electricity on rural poverty see, Abul Barkat (2005a), “Bangladesh Rural Electrification Program: A Success Story of Poverty Reduction through Electricity”.

\(^9\) Details about “not urbanization per se but slumization” see, Abul Barkat and S Akhter (2001). “Mushrooming Population: The Threat of Slumization Instead of Urbanization in Bangladesh”.

b. Middle class people are relatively more concentrated in the urban areas (45% of urban population) compared to rural (27% of rural population). But, about 66% of all middle class population lives in the rural areas (of whom about 59% represent lower middle class).

c. The population size in the middle class, during last 25 years, has increased by 10.5 million (from 36.5 million in 1984 to 47 million in 2010). Sixty percent of this increment in 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 25 years, while the size of population in the middle class has increased by 29%, the lower middle class has increased by 34% at the time when a large number of lower middle class has gone down to join the poor.

e. The population size in the rich (upper class) category is 4.1 million (in 2010). That is, during the last 25 years, there has been an addition of 0.8 million population in the rich category – an increase of 24% between 1984 and 2010 (with a low base of 3.3 million in 1984). More importantly, the relative share of rich category in the total population has decreased from 3.3% in 1984 to 2.7% in 2010. And, based on studies on economic criminalization and black economy, it can be argued that within the rich a minority group has been created who are super rich or, in other words, there may be 10% among rich who commands 90% of the wealth of total rich category.

Therefore the balance of dynamics of socio-economic class structure in Bangladesh clearly depicts that, during the last twenty five years, overall poverty and inequality situation has worsened: the middle class has shown a downward tendency with extended reproduction of poor from lower middle class, and reproduction of lower middle class from mid-middle class; and wealth has been accumulated in the hands of a few rich (2.7% of total population, but may be 90% of their wealth in 10% of them). This worsening mass poverty and widening of inequality coupled with declining non-stable middle class and ‘naked’ super-richness of few is the solid ground which has been created in Bangladesh, and which, at the same time, forms the most fertile ground for both production and extended reproduction of religious communalism, militarism and fundamentalism in all spheres of life.

The above analysis permits to conclude that although historical development of over last few centuries do not indicate communalization of the economy, the anti-human development and anti-human welfare efforts of the recent past have strengthened the politico-economic basis of religious extremism and nourished all the conditions for strengthening the base for economic fundamentalism. And all the elements of so-called development within economic and political criminalization including globalization have accelerated the process.

**Economics of fundamentalism – Magnitude, mechanisms, strength, and sources**

In post liberation Bangladesh, political power favouring people’s welfare has not evolved. Autocracy or a parliament with vested interest of black money has come back to state power again and again. Economy has been criminalized and that has enhanced effective demand for criminalization of politics. The extent of criminalization of our economy can be indicated as follows: during last over 35 years (between 1975 and 2012), a total of about US$ 33 billion (Bd.Tk.2000 billion; 1US$=Bd.Tk.60) of foreign loans and grants have come to Bangladesh officially. An estimated 75% of these have been mis-appropriated by national-international vested interest groups\(^\text{10}\) (nationally, the number of such criminals would be about 200,000 families with 1 million people). These people now produce black money

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\(^{10}\) For details see, Abul Barkat (2001), “How Much Foreign Aid Does Bangladesh Really Need: Political Economy of Last Three Decades”. 
equivalent to approximately US$ 12 billion (Tk. 700 billion) annually. Estimates show that the total amount of black money produced in the country during the last 37 years would be equivalent to about US$ 117 billion (Bd. Taka 7000 billion)\(^{11}\). These same agents of criminalized economy are involved in money laundering equivalent to about US$ 5-7 billion (Bd. Tk. 300-400 billion) annually. These are the members of organized syndicates who are responsible for artificial price hike of essential commodities (food and non-food)\(^{12}\). They are the bank loan defaulters of about US$ 7 billion (Bd. Tk. 400 billion). These are the people many of who are involved in illegal trading of drugs and arms of high value. For any government procurement (under Annual Development Program), or in any big tender they have to be paid at least 20% commission as rent for doing business in “their territory of influence”. These people have unlawfully occupied khas (government owned) land and water-bodies – grabbers of around 10 million acres of khas land and water-bodies. Some of these people are the owners of commercial shrimp firms (gher) who command over private armed brigades in the coastal belts. It is to note that, geographically, these coastal belts are good breeding ground for religious extremists.

This economic criminalization has increased effective demand for political criminalization. And political criminalization has many faces: the economic criminals, for their self-interest, grab political processes and influence decision making institutions in such a way that it becomes impossible to conduct state affairs as per Constitutional norms. They finance concerned organizations and persons of mainstream power politics. They patronize grafts and corruption. They play critical role in determining state budget allocation and enjoy the same. They grab everything—land, water, and even the judgment (verdict) of the court. They utilize the coverage of the religion, wherever needed, and of late, they do anything and everything in the name of religion. They ‘purchase’ the seats of the parliament—they know that depending on circumstances, by investing US$ 167 thousand to US$ 4.7 million (permissible limit for expenses by a candidate in National election is US$ 8,333) they can “purchase” a seat in the parliament. And they go on practicing the same – in 1954 Parliament “business” people constituted 4% in the parliament and now they constitute 84% in the parliament. Even the Election Commission do not know for certain what the “business” is. People have got no confidence in their heart in such criminals of politics and economics. Now there is no ‘role model’ in politics before people—such tendencies have created frustrations and hopelessness among the mass. These factors have become extremely facilitative in creating ‘space’ for the spread of religious extremism and ultra communal fundamentalism\(^{13}\).

Primarily because of economic and political criminalization people have either already lost or are increasingly losing confidence in the so-called democratic politicians, and at the same time, the progressive tendencies either have not evolved or are not evolving. When people become steadily endangered, they lose confidence in state institutions, and when lack of confidence becomes rule then greater part of people increasingly and gradually become dependent on fate. And this dependence on fate is increasing in an agrarian economy, where 60% of the farmers are effectively landless, and it shouldn’t be forgotten that Islam here in East Bengal has evolved based on agriculture. The politics of Islamic fundamentalism is utilizing this vacuum. They have seen in their own eyes how communal forces even in a country like India, where democracy prevailed for long, have captured initially 2-3 seats in the parliament, and finally became successful in capturing state power in 10-15 years. In addition to others, these are some of the examples based on which they think that their dream of climbing the 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

\(^{11}\) For details, see Abul Barkat (2005e), “On Price Hike of Essential Commodities and Human Development Within the Context of Political Economy of Criminalization”.

\(^{12}\) For details, see Abul Barkat (2006b), “A Non-poor’s Thinking about Poverty: Political Economy of Poverty in Bangladesh”.

\(^{13}\) See for details: Abul Barkat (2005d), “Criminalization of Politics in Bangladesh” and (2005f) “Right to Development and Human Development: The Case of Bangladesh”. 
own ("Egyptian experience"). It is based on this necessity of "economic power-based political process” that they practice different politico-economic organizational models in different places with an objective of capturing state power through formation of a cadre-based militant party (they call it “Jihadi Party”). And based on ‘Khomeni experience’ in Iran they argue both possibility and necessity of capturing state power. Therefore, in the whole process of transformation of once humanistic Islam in to political Islam, they have successfully assimilated the mythos of religion with logos of reality, and under the overall umbrella of an Islamist Political Party (with many branches including militant activists) pursue economic power-based political processes aimed at capturing the state power. Ideologically, they argue this process as 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 is experimenting effectiveness of various politico-economic models with the help of cadre-based politics. This politico-economic organizational 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 the state power. The following twelve, as shown in diagram 1, constitute the key sectoral elements of the model: financial institutions, educational institutions, pharmaceutical-diagnostic and health-related institutions, religious organizations, trade and commercial establishment, transport related organizations, real estate, news media and IT, local government, NGOs, Bangla Bhai or JMB, Jama‘atul Muzahideen Bangladesh, Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami14 (Bangladesh, HUJI-B) (and such program based organizations), and occupational/ professional activity-based organizations including farmers and industrial workers. Among these institutions not all are profit-earning (for example, local government and professional groups). In such case, cross subsidies are given, and they earn high profit even in so-called non-profit organizations for example, Bangla Bhai project, where land revenue and extortion have been instituted.

14 These program-based Islamic fundamentalist organizations are primarily the militant fronts of the mainstream Islamist Party. There are 125 such Islamist militant-extremist groups in Bangladesh, 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-Sayed Mubaddeh Bahini, Al-Tanjeeb, Arakan Majaheed Party (and other groups carrying ‘Arakan’ names), Harkat-ul Jihad, Harkat-ul-Islam Al-Jihad, Hijbut Tawheed, Hijbut Tahrir, Islami Bippobi Parishad, Iktadul-Talah Al-Muslemin, Jama‘atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB), Jaggrata Muslim Janata (JMJ), Joyshe Mohammad, Joyshe Mostafa, Jangi Hakikat, Jamaeel-ul Falayia, Jamaat-e-Yahiya Jummatul Al-Sadaat, Sahadat-e-Al-Hikma, Shakhadat-e-Nobuyot, Hijabullah Islami Samaj, Hizbul Mahadi, ibedatul Al-Muslemin, Jamiaayeete Islami Solidarity Front, Rohingya Independence Force (and other groups carrying ‘Rohingya’ name), Tahefize Harmayin, Khedmate Islam, Islahul Muslemin, Islami Liberation Tiger, Ta-Amir Ud-Din, Tauheed Janata (see Barkat 2013). All of these militant groups receive funding and other support from both external sources and domestic economy of fundamentalism.
Even in some areas the high profit is earned in Madrasas, meaning at the end of the year income is higher than expenditure. Another good example is the registration of “Chashi Kallayan Samity” (Farmers Welfare Association) — the 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 “Political Party or their affiliates can not be registered with NGO Affairs Bureau which permits obtaining foreign fund for political activities”. Earning profit from not-for-profit organizations is a major strength of religious politics, which is possible because of perfectly exploiting people’s psychology of “dependence on fate or destiny”. This can be concluded, based on the fact (among others) that most Jihadis (armed) caught by the police in the last few months (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”.

Link between mainstream Islamist Party and religious extremists:
Source of funding
The most recent country-wide horrible serial bomb blasts by Jama’at-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh, JMB (on 17th August 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-organizations (e.g., officially banned JMB or JMJB) and the mainstream “Islamic” political party in Bangladesh. This disconnect is neither established, nor it can be established. To 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 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 mainstrem open “Islami” party has not yet denounced the bombing activities and bombing organizations 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 organizing 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 is frequently published in all the prominent Daily News papers in Bangladesh; the most recent being published in Prothom Alo, 21 September 2005, titled “Five JMP leaders arrested in Chittagong were involved with Jamat Politics; Tk.160,000 was transacted through Islami Bank”; the Daily Star, 31 August 2005 “34 Islamic NGOs get over Tk.200 Cr. (US $ 33 million) from donors a year”; the Daily Star, 22 September 2005 “Jamaat link to militants becomes evident”; the Daily Ittefaq, 26 September 2005 “Over 1000 militants have been released, and 40% of them belong to Jamaat-e-Islami”; the Daily Star, 5 December 2005 “Just days before the November 29 carnage on two court premises, the government gave consent to release a fund of about US $ 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”.

Diagram 1: The politico-economic organizational model of religious fundamentalism
The above-mentioned organization models of economic fundamentalism differ significantly from usual business norms and strategies. The key characteristics of conducting the economic model-strategies of fundamentalism are as follows: 1) each model is run by ideologically motivated experts aiming at attaining their supreme political goal “capture state power”, 2) in each model, multi-faceted management procedures are applied, where policy matters are being controlled by 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 guerilla warfare), 4) each model is well coordinated and well-disciplined (follows the form of military discipline) following the profit spirit of private sector organizations, 5) whenever a model is found successful in realizing its politico-economic objectives, it is quickly replicated at different strategic places. Therefore, it can be argued that, in persuading their economic models, the religious fundamentalists are politically fully conscious about their key aim of capturing state power, and they constantly try to use scientific means and methods in their own way for realization of the goal. This 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 to the past – they are innovative and modernizing.

In terms of source of funding, some experts argue that the Islamist religious extremists procure the whole (or most) money from abroad for conducting their activities. This idea may be untrue to a great extent although they have joint collaboration in trade and commerce with foreign co-ideology investors. It is most likely that the major portion of the donations come from foreign source to and through the NGOs controlled by them. The above-mentioned hypothesis may not be correct to a large extent because religious fundamentalism have already been successful in building strong economic base of their own. This has happened or happening as follows: they were directly involved in looting the properties of common 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 mid 1970’s; they invested such resources to build relevant socio-politico-economic models (shown in Diagram 1). In most of the cases, their invested money earns high profit. They utilize a part of the profit to promote organizational activities. A part of the profit has been spent for extension of the institution and a part has been spent for creation of new institutions.

The estimated annual net profit of economic fundamentalism in Bangladesh would be about US$ 250 million (Bd. Taka 20 Billion) The highest share of such profit, 27% (of total net profit) comes from financial institutions (bank, insurance company, leasing company, etc.)

15 Fundamentalism is a child of globalization, which it both responds to and utilizes. Fundamentalist groups everywhere have made extensive use of new communications technologies. Before he came to power in Iran, the Ayatollah Khomeini circulated videos and cassettes of his teachings. Hindutwa militants have made extensive use of the Internet and electronic mail to create a ‘feeling of Hindu identity’ (Giddens 2003: 50-51).

16 This include expenditure on account of salary to the political workers, expenditure in connection with conduct of day to day political activity, and running arms training centers (foreign ministry of India have accused that there are 148 arms training center for the fundamentalists in Bangladesh. This accusation has not been denied formally. Similar accusation has been made by United States and European Union. The government’s position on the existence of such arms training center in Bangladesh was unclear until 17th August 2005 (i.e., until the day of countrywide serial bomb blasts). The government until that period used to say that “JMB and JMJB does not exist, these are creations of media and political opposition”. However, after 17th August 2005 incidence the government was forced to change her position: from non-recognition to tacit recognition of existence of militant activities. The print and electronic media have been openly disseminating information about such arms, explosives, relevant leaflets and booklets, training centers with photo of trainers etc.

17 The link between Islamic Bank (the local bank with highest amount of market capitalization 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.
The second highest, 18.8% of total net profit comes from NGOs, trusts and foundations\(^{18}\), 10.8% comes from trading concerns, 10.4% profit comes from pharmaceutical industry and health institution including diagnostic centers, 9.2% comes from educational institutions, 8.5% comes from real estate business, 7.8% comes from media and IT business, and 7.5% comes from transport sector (see Table 3). Although the above net profit earning is largely based on heuristic estimates, the pattern is (at least) indicative of the directions. At the same time, this pattern of net profit earning by various sectors and sub-sectors of the fundamentalist economics is in congruence with the mainstream economic trends.

Table 3: Sector-Institution wise breakup of annual net profit of economic fundamentalists (estimated) for 2010\(^{*}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector-Institution</th>
<th>Annual net profit (in US$ million)</th>
<th>Percentage share in total net profit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Financial Institution: Bank, Insurance, Leasing Company.</td>
<td>67.5</td>
<td>27.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trading organization: Retail, Wholesale, Departmental store</td>
<td>27.0</td>
<td>10.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pharmaceutical Industry, Health Institution including Diagnostic center</td>
<td>26.0</td>
<td>10.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Institution: School, College, University, Coaching Centres</td>
<td>23.0</td>
<td>9.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport and Communications: Rickshaw, vans, three wheeled CNG, Car, Truck, Bus, Launch, Steamers, Ocean-going Vessels, etc.</td>
<td>18.7</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Real Estate: Land, Building</td>
<td>21.3</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media and IT</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGOs, Trusts and Foundations</td>
<td>47.0</td>
<td>18.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*About the methodology of estimation:* In estimating profit of economic sectors-institutions a heuristic method has been followed. Although the process is based on assumptions, the basis of 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 (real truth is not known to any one; that is not published.) Although, in case of a few sectors-institutions, formal data about investment is available (which is again not close to reality), in most of the cases such data are absent/unpublished. Although, in some cases the published audit report and/or annual report are available, in most cases, they are incomplete and highly inaccurate, and therefore, totally misleading.

If economies of fundamentalism earns a net profit of US$ 250 million a year, in which case the degree of communalization of the Bangladesh economy indicating the strength-extent of economic fundamentalism will be equivalent to:

1. 1.02% of annual national investment (in current price), or
2. 1.31% of private sector investment in the country, or
3. 2.1% of the government annual revenue collections, or
4. 1.54% of the export earning of the country, or
5. 5.58% of government annual development budget, or
6. 8.62% of the annual development budget of the government.

At the same time, in understanding the future possibility of expansion of economy of fundamentalism, it is important to indicate that the rate of growth of economy of fundamentalism is higher (annual growth rate of 7.5% to 9%) than the annual growth rate of economic institutions and subsequently establish and consolidate linkages between their political agenda and economic interest.

\(^{18}\) In Bangladesh there are about 231 NGOs under the control of the Islamist fundamentalists. The ten most prominent Islamic NGOs having links with extremist activities include Revival of Islamic Heritage Society (RIHS), Rabita Al-Alam Al-Islami, Society of Social Reforms, Qatar Charitable Society, Al-Muntada Al-Islami, Islamic Relief Agency, Al-Forkan Foundation, International Relief Organization, Kuwait Joint Relief Committee, Muslim Aid Bangladesh. Most part of their external financial support comes from middle-east. Many receive financial support even from the developed countries. This 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 control of the 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 effort of empowerment of women, the fundamentalists NGOs are not lagging behind. But they say, “Women 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.
the mainstream economy (annual growth of 5% to 6%), and, therefore, as such, there is no doubt that, other things remaining the same, the communalization of Bangladesh economy will grow further.

In the analysis of economics of fundamentalism, a few more things can be indicated with high certainty: 1) they have invested both for short term and long term benefits in the sectors in which it is possible to earn highest possible profit, this means that whatever interest they apparently display about the life hereafter, they are more conscious than anyone else about material life in this world, 2) they are more interested in strategic investment, 3) they have chosen such sector for investment which allow them to reach more people with higher speed, 4) their sector-wise investment framework is quite balanced, 5) it is possible for them to appoint 500,000 full time cadre in organizational by spending only 10% of net profit (they do so and they provide cross subsidy to other sector from the net profit), and 6) they (mis) use their political and economic power (using Jihad as pretext) for placing their ultra communal cadres in a planned way in the key strategic positions of the government, autonomous and semi-autonomous bodies, and in the private sectors.

A best ‘proxy measure’ to show the strength of economics of fundamentalism would be through analysis of the pattern and intensity of political actions of religious extremism. An analysis of such actions of the religious extremists in Bangladesh during the last ten years shows rising tendency of relevant terrorist activities with some qualitative changes. Such changes include, among others, from covert to overt actions, from use of single-edged to double-edged weapons, etc. An analysis of terrorist acts of religious extremists permits to conclude at least, the followings: 1) Since they want to capture the state and change the Bengali culture the prime targets of their attack include institutions and persons representing key government administration (e.g. district commissioner), secular culture (theatre, cinema hall, folk gatherings, social gathering, community centre, library, shrine of Sufis), and judiciary (court), 2) the intensity of action is relatively less when secular democratic government is in power, 3) intensity increases with fundamentalists presence in power, and 4) intensity will increase more in the near future if not stopped, and that might increase even if they are not in power-sharing situation because they follow the strategy “consolidate strength while government buys time”.
Table 4: Chronology of major terrorist acts of religious extremists in Bangladesh: 1999-2005

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date of occurrence</th>
<th>Target act: nature and place</th>
<th>Visible loss</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6 March 1999</td>
<td>Bomb explosion at cultural program of Udichi, Jessore</td>
<td>10 killed, 105 injured</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 October 1999</td>
<td>Bomb explosion on Ahmedia Mosque, Khulna</td>
<td>8 killed, 32 injured</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 January 2001</td>
<td>Time bomb explosion in CPB meeting, Dhaka</td>
<td>7 killed, 52 injured</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 April 2001</td>
<td>Bomb explosion on Pahela Baisakh (Bengali new year) celebration, Dhaka</td>
<td>11 killed, 120 injured</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 June 2001</td>
<td>Time bomb explosion in Church, Gopalgonj</td>
<td>10 killed, 25 injured</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 June 2001</td>
<td>Bomb explosion on Awami League Office, Narayangonj</td>
<td>22 killed, 50 injured</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 November 2001</td>
<td>Killing of Hindu educationist, Principal Gopal Krishna Muhuri</td>
<td>Killed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 April 2002</td>
<td>Killing of Buddhist monk, Gainjoti Mohathero</td>
<td>Killed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 December 2002</td>
<td>Bombing in 4 cinema halls, Mymensingh</td>
<td>27 killed, 298 injured</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 January 2003</td>
<td>Bombing in Sufi Shrine, Sakhipur, Tangil</td>
<td>7 killed, 26 injured</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 January 2004</td>
<td>Bombing in Shahjalal Sufi Shrine, Sylhet</td>
<td>5 killed, 52 injured</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27 February 2004</td>
<td>Deadly attack on secular writer, Professor Humayun Azad (of Dhaka University)</td>
<td>Died after injury</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 April 2004</td>
<td>Deadly cargo, Chittagong: 2000 automatic/semi automatic weapons, 40 rocket-propelled grenades (RPG), 25,000 hand grenades, 1.8 million rounds of small arms ammunition.</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 May 2004</td>
<td>Bombing in Shahjalal Sufi Shrine, Sylhet</td>
<td>3 killed, 65 injured including British High Commissioner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 August 2004</td>
<td>Grenade attack on leader of the opposition (Sheikh Hasina) in a public meeting: Biggest awakening.</td>
<td>24 killed, 503 injured</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27 January 2005</td>
<td>Grenade attack in a public meeting of the opposition</td>
<td>5 killed including former Finance Minister SAMS Kibria (a member of Parliament, and former UN under Secretary General)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 February 2005</td>
<td>Bombing on NGO offices (BRAC), Raipur, Naogaon</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 August 2005</td>
<td>Great awakening: 500 serial bombing across country in 30 minutes</td>
<td>(A highly coordinated terrorist activity)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003-2005</td>
<td>Murder by Bangla Bhai group (JMJB), North Bengal</td>
<td>35 killed, 123 injured</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 October 2005</td>
<td>Bombing in 3 Court buildings(Chandpur, Laxmipur, Chittagong)</td>
<td>2 killed, 39 injured</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 November 2005</td>
<td>Bombing in Government residence, Jhalokhathi</td>
<td>2 killed, 4 injured</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29 November 2005</td>
<td>Bombing in Lawyers Association Building, Gazipur</td>
<td>10 killed, 220 injured</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29 November 2005</td>
<td>Bombing in a Police Box, Chittagong</td>
<td>3 killed, 25 injured</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 December 2005</td>
<td>Bombing on Deputy Commissioner’s Office, Gazipur</td>
<td>1 killed, 50 injured</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 December 2005</td>
<td>Bomb exploding on Udichi Cultural Office, Netrokona</td>
<td>8 killed, 100 injured</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It would be appropriate to indicate a few more things associated with the expansion and prospect of economics and related politics of fundamentalism in Bangladesh. The fact is that, we were self-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 particularly first in the Muslim majority countries to include secularism in the Constitution (of 1972, of course discarded later on with inclusion of “Islam will be the state religion”). We were satisfied with the reflection of our dormant aspirations in our Constitution. But religious ultra communal forces – the ‘war criminals’ and collaborators of Pak army whom we pardoned (and thus we became bearer of the mainstream Islam) – understood it clearly that the way the state was being run would make no fundamental change in the life of the people. They could foresee that our people would be de-motivated about the present leadership within few years. And if they make good use of the opportunity, their (the defeated forces in the Liberation War) victory would be certain. In contemporary periods, the pace of progress was relatively slow, but the religious forces were marching forward with relatively high speed and took all the opportunities and preparations in secret. The result of such preparation was capturing the village by using deep tube-well centric society, peasant society, Mosque and Madrasa-whatever is the medium, establishing undisputed strong hold 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, economic institutions of fundamentalists played targeted role. Likewise due to adopting this strategy those institutions were also strengthened. And these generated synergistic effects. In this respect, religious fundamentalists were not idealistic in the least in giving political leadership; in fact, 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 of the seats of the parliament (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 of muscle power in national parliamentary elections. On the other hand, as displayed on 17th August 2005, they are well capable of organizing nation-wide serial bomb blasts, and that with 100% military accuracy. By no means is this a weak opponent. To the contrary, this is a strong force representing a triangle-of-power (as shown in Figure 1).
Figure 1: A simple model showing strategic interdependence of Islamist forces in Bangladesh

Therefore, the situation has reached a stage, which can be portrayed 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 don’t have any hesitation about their aim and object, as against this, we have confusions. They believe deeply in whatever they do. But it seems, we have lost confidence in ourselves. They are perfectly able to use the frustrations of the ever-growing unemployment among the youths to lead them to parochial interest. On the other hand, we are avoiding 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).
Economics and politics of Islamist extremism: Limits to growth, and the way out

Historically speaking, the role of war in some places, peaceful way in some other areas, and the mixture of the two in other places in propagation of various religions including Islam is well known. It is notable that wherever sword-war was used for propagation of a religion, outcomes were either the establishment of monarchy or a repressive state. But wherever a religion was propagated in a relatively peaceful way - for example in our country where the Ulemaa’s, Sufi’s and Devotees propagated Islam – in such places religion based on ultra-communal politics could not get a strong root. To the contrary, wherever the religious leaders tried to conduct the statecraft with the help of religion, they faced opposition. This is most likely due to the fact that as a result of peaceful propagation of religion and following religious rites, people have become religious-minded (pious) over generations but they never became dogmatic religiousists. This 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 humanitarian essence of religions is evident in the origin of Islam in East Bengal. And evolution of such process has deeply ingrained that into the minds of Bengali-Muslims (which I term as “positive DNA factor”). And that is why whatsoever strength economic fundamentalism may have acquired in Bangladesh it would not be possible for them to capture the state power by using that economic strength. In this regard three examples may be relevant: 1) in this country, due to the Enemy Property Act or Vested Property Act, a total of about 2.6 million acres of landed property of 6 million Hindus have been grabbed by only 0.4% Muslims (if the snatchers are all Muslims at all). This means that 99.6% 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 affair), 2) whatever help the state might have given to the communal fundamentalists of Baghmara-Bangla Bhai (JMJB), people of the locality unitedly faced them. This is the outcome of dormant feelings of non-communalism among the majority Muslims of Bangladesh, 3) In 1985 when the roof of huge 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 who were Hindus by religion that probably indicates the unlimited power of secular feelings among the majority Muslims in Bangladesh.

The greatest danger in the rise of politics and economics of fundamentalism 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 key spheres of life and state operation, namely in economic sectors, in political institutions, in key positions in the administration and judiciary, in government – autonomous – semi autonomous bodies and private sectors, in educational institutions with predominance in Madrasha system, in health, in NGOs, in women’s organizations and in many professional bodies. Because of their command over 5-7% votes (more importantly, their rate of casting is almost 100%), within an equi-strength bi-partisan political system (the two major political parties in Bangladesh are Awami League and Nationalist Party) the major mainstream Islamist party is strategically well positioned in forming the government after national parliamentary election. And they use this strength to their advantage in further institutionalization of Islamist fundamentalism. The degree of this institutionalized strength of religion-based fundamentalism is evident, among others, in their following recent statements:

“1971 and 2006 is not the same”;
“We are not a drop of water on betel leaf that a nimble touch would just make us fall”;
“You will misjudge our strength if you try to understand us by number of our seats in the parliament”;
“Wait and see, Islamic Shariah rule will be established soon”;
“Suicide is a great sin in Islam, but it is permissible in ‘Jihad’;
“Man made Constitution should be replaced by the Shariah Laws”;
“Be ready to face a civil war”. 
In addition to the above stated, the relative strength of institutionalized fundamentalism is also evident in the formation and operation of Islamic Shariah Council against the usual norm of the Central Bank (the Bangladesh Bank). This 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 implementation of Shariah rule through mosque-based administration and judiciary. This Islamic Shariah Council is an illegal entity according to the Company Act and Banking Act operating in Bangladesh. The Central Bank’s attempts to ban this Islamic Shariah Council and even the attempt to institute a “guideline for “Islamic banking” in Bangladesh could not be materialized in the past. And finally, an attempt to pass a law in the parliament “Against religious extremism” ended up with a gross failure.

The danger of fundamentalism lies—in addition to its institutionalization—in the ‘logos’ part of its political ideology reflected in their pragmatic (‘beyond-dogma’) actions. This is evident, among others, in the following ‘realistic’ strategic political statement of the mainstream Islamist party:

“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”;

“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 in 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 future secular development of Bangladesh. However, in reality, there is no logical room for complacency. This is because, in one hand, the politics of Islamist extremism is based solely on dogma and devoid of any reasoning and, on the other, the economic power based political process has already been institutionalized, to a large extent. Both economy 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 in the world including us in 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 economics of Islamist extremism has extended and is expanding—the fight has to be total, all encompassing, multi dimensional and multi faceted. This fight is against regressive mind-set by the progressive forces, and for the Sufis, Devotees and enlightened religious learned persons, this is a fight against anti-humanist communalism for reestablishing 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 Ulemas’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. This 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 to ensure progress, there is no alternative but to devote all out efforts towards uniting people on the basis of the true process of enlightenment.
Conclusions

The expanded religious fanaticism, armed communalism and associated fundamentalization of economy is not a simple social problem *per se* (among many other problems), it is rather indicative of a deep rooted crisis of embattled faith rooted in increasing inequality and fear. This 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 in the essence of 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 (Shahbagh 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 1971 Liberation War and the basis of 1972 Constitution of Bangladesh. In long run, fighting religious extremism by keeping mass people unempowered and poor is an improbable proposition. It is high time to devise most appropriate strategy to simultaneously negotiate rising religiosity with rising inequality – a difficult practical issue to resolve because one breeds the other.
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