

# Religious extremism and economic development

## I. Introduction

### Thesis statement:

Religious extremism is inversely related with economic development. Former leads to wastage of economic resources, hard imaging, low foreign direct investment and many more. However, pragmatic steps can eliminate this menace.

## II. Nexus between religious extremism and economic development

### III. Religious extremism a threat to economic development

- (a) Focus on state security because of rising threats from extremists leaves the economy orphan
- (b) Projection of hard image of Pakistan in global community
- (c) Hindrance in the way of local investment and foreign direct investment

- (d) Negative effect on the tourism industry
- (e) Disruption in economic activities due to extremists' violence
- (f) Extremism a leading cause behind the brain-drain from Pakistan

#### IV. Way Forward

- (a) Redesign the educational curriculum
- (b) Will of the state should be implemented in letter and spirit
- (c) Religious custodians should disown extremist ideologies
- (d) Eliminate gender discrimination
- (e) Promote rationalism in society
- (f) Combat identity crisis and ideological disformation on social media
- (g) Media should play its constructive role in countering

religious extremism.

v. **Conclusion**

As the malignant tumor wreaks havoc in an organism, religious extremism brings disruption in economic activities. Both malignant tumor and religious extremism are not localized, they spread just like fire in the forest.

There is interconnection between them. Religious extremism poses a grave threat to economic development in different ways.

The foremost among them is leaving the economy orphan, other factors are hard imaging, low foreign direct investment, adverse impacts on the tourism. Last but not the least, it causes brain-drain from Pakistan. However, panacea for curbing things like religious extrem is reinvigorate the educational curriculum. Other ways include establish the will of the state, religious

custodians should disown the extremist ideologies and the media should also play its positive role. In short, religious extremism and economic development are antagonistic to each other. It is due to religious extremism leads to wastage of capital and human resources in security purposes. Moreover, foreign direct investment, local investment and hard image of Pakistan are due to violent religious extremism. However, comprehensive and bold steps are required to weed out the menace of religious extremism.

Religious extremism is connected with economic development but in inverse way. Violence is an ultimate outcome of religious fanaticism. This violence hampers economic prosperity.

Now the world is globalized, therefore, peaceful coexistence is a pre-requisite for economic well being. Unfortunately, many Western minds promoted extremism through their write ups and campaigns. It leads to economic down fall in many of the developing countries like Pakistan. For instance, 'Clash of civilization' a book which is written by Huntington has brought Western civilization and Islamic civilization in front of each other. This clash has further aggravated the religious extremism. People of both sides started to see themselves as threat. Consequently, economic interchange was hampered to a great extent. Entry from many of the Muslim countries is banned by the Western world.

All these things led to disruption in economic activities. So the deep rooted link between religious extremism and economic development cannot be overlooked.

Religious extremism is a massive challenge for economic development in many ways, the foremost among them is the state's focus diversion to security instead of economic side. Economic world flourishes with watchfulness. The state requires a deep attention to adapt itself according to the dynamics of the world. But when the state is security ridden, it is unable to evolve with the fastly growing market world. This point can be substantiated by taking the example of Nigeria where the business activities as

well as market working is almost dismantled due to an extremist group - Boko Haram. Same is the case of the Arab countries like Syria and Iran, which are facing the menace of extremism and terrorism. Therefore, they have very pathetic condition on economic ranking lists. They are facing poverty, unemployment, inflation and many more. So it is proved that violent religious extremist elements are a big hindrance in the economic well being of these states.

Furthermore, religious extremism has tarnished the image of Pakistan in the international community, bad imaging is an inhibitor in the progress of economy. Trust



is an important factor in the business world. When an image of state is not good, then mistrust is automatically generated. This mistrust is an impediment in the economic well being. For example, foreign direct investment and local investment are discouraged due to violent religious extremist activities. Pakistan is facing the same problem due to rise in religious extremism. A few weeks ago, unfortunate event took place in Jahannawala, Faisalabad where a violent mob burnt many churches into ashes. This incident has damaged the image of Pakistan very drastically. Consequently, foreign investors further distance themselves from investing in Pakistan. In this crisis situation, Pakistan needs the foreign

direct investment from different countries. The tragic incidents like Jahnawala are hindering this investment.

In addition to worst imaging, foreign direct investment and local investment are declined due to religious extremism. Both are important to run the economic cycle of a state. But violent actions create a sense of fear among investors and they opt to invest in a safer state. Pakistan is going through same crisis. It is facing multifaceted issues like current account deficit, currency depreciation, budget deficit, trade deficit and many more. Resultantly it is at the verge of economic default. However, remittances, foreign direct investment and

Local investment provide the lifeline to Pakistan. But these are impacted by religious extremism. Therefore, Pakistan has very low foreign direct investment and local investment.

Not only the foreign direct investment and local investment are discouraged due to religious extremism, but also the tourism industry is affected badly. Tourism provides a great chunk of money from the local as well as from the international tourists. In many countries, tourism is an important contributor to their GDP. But those countries which are entrenched in religious extremism have not tapped the potential of tourism. For instance, France, Sweden, Turkiye

and many other European countries earn billion of dollars from tourism. This earning helps them to strengthen their economy. However, the developing countries like Pakistan and most of the Arab countries have not earned so much from tourism because of violent extremist elements. The reason is that extremist people pose a threat to any individual belonging to different religion. Therefore this sense of fear discourage tourists to visit these countries. Consequently, those countries having religious extremism have very weak tourism industry.

Even economic activities are disrupted due to extremist violence. Religious

Panatics do not care about the well being of a state. They are motivated by so called custodians of religion. Unfortunately, they try to choke the blood supply of a body. When economic activities of a state are stopped by the religious extremists. The blood in the form of money cannot circulate in the body of a state. Consequently, the state goes in the state of unconsciousness. If it remains for a long time, the state will not be able to survive. One of the prominent examples of this is Farzabad sit-in by religious parties. It hindered the supply chain of Pakistan. It disrupted transportation network and slowed down the economic wheel. So religious extremism is a set-back to

economic activities in a state.

Moreover, religious extremism is one of the leading causes of brain-drain. Brain-drain has adverse impacts on a state because the cream of the state is drained in this phenomenon. When the trained and skillful minds leave a country, local industries as well as other sectors do not perform well. This occurs from the developing states to the developed states, and the main reason among other factors is religious extremism. Intolerance and extremism make a state inhabitable for its citizen. Pakistan can be taken as a case study. Since 1971, the Bureau of Emigration and Overseas

Employment estimates that over 10 million Pakistan have gone abroad. The era of Zia was worst in this regard. He tried to implement the hard version of Islam. Consequently, people discouraged from living in Pakistan especially minorities like Christians, Ahmadis and others. Now the situation is not very different. For example, in 2022, 800,000<sup>people</sup> left Pakistan. According to Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE), "67 percent of Pakistani youngsters want to leave the country". This staggering figure prompts Pakistan to introspect why so many learned minds are leaving Pakistan. Although economic indicators are not good in Pakistan, but the religious extremism is acting like a push factor for

many young minds of Pakistan

However, the menace of religious extremism can be curbed by taking following steps, the foremost among them is to redesign educational curriculum. Children are like blank pages, what is written on them, they act according to them. So it is necessary that educational curriculum should contain material which promotes tolerance, pluralism, patience, love and sympathy. For example, Pakistan can eradicate religious extremism to a great extent by curbing extremist literature which promotes Jihadi culture. Its roots lie in the era of Zia ul Haq (1979-1989) who promoted Jihadi culture. This



time period has worst impact on the minds of Pakistanis. So it is the need of the hour to promote egalitarianism and pluralism through books, news, literature and media. In this way religious extremism will minimize, and the economy of Pakistan will run smoothly.

Another way to counter religious extremism is the establishment of the writ of the state. There should be rule of law in the country. No one is above the law. In order to rein in the extremist factors, the state should be strong enough in taking stringent actions against them. For example, In case of Pakistan, economic activities are halted whenever any

religious campaign erupted. Here the food for the thought is that taking soft position towards extremists will not work, this is proven fact from the history of Pakistan. So the law enforcement agencies should work in collaboration with the political leadership. If reavure, they should crackdown on the hard core violent elements. In this way, a deterrence will create and no one will think about the vandalising the infrastructure and blocking the economic activities. In this way, religious extremism can be controlled.

In addition to the writ of the state, it is important that the religious leaders should disown extremist ideologies.

In developing societies like Pakistan, religion is misused for vested interests by different power corridors. This misuse causes extremism. So the religious leaders should distance themselves from the extremist ideologies. For example, the religious leaders from different sects like Sunni and Shia should come together on common principles. They should teach Islam talks about peace. It teaches about the eradication of fitna instead of spreading violence. Moreover, they should give sermons and speeches on tolerance which is the core ingredient in the Islamic teachings. In this way, religious extremism can be removed.

Likewise, there is need of rationalism in

society instead of emotionalism. The reason is that a rational person always talks with logic and reason. He does not come under the influence of religious fanatics. While an emotional person can easily be tricked by so called religion savours, consequently, he traps in the false ideologies of an extremist group. For example, in the days of elections in India, ultra nationalist groups use religion as a tool to gain more and more votes. Hinduism is propounded as a superior religion, and people from other religions are persecuted as well as tortured. This promotes an extreme form of violence. Babri mosque demolition is just one example of religious

extremism. So there is need to educate people and promote rational thinking among them in order to wipe out gut-wrenching extremism. When religious extremism is removed, economic indicators will ultimately improve.

Furthermore, the state should take steps against ideological disinformation on social media, and try to resolve the issue of identity crisis. In the digital world, information spreads just like fire in the forest. But the problem is that ~~the~~ sometimes this information is manipulated and engineered in order to teach the lesson to an opponent state. Similarly, identity crisis is another problem in the current generation.

Both of these issues promote extremism. So there is need to solve them. For example, the young generation in Pakistani along with other citizens are facing identity crisis. They are confused who are they actually? The reason is that Pakistan is swinging between secularism and ~~an~~ an ideological ~~principles~~ principles. Pakistan is not a true democratic state, in simple terms it has a hybrid regime. So many things are creating a mess for young minds. They are facing identity crisis which is exploited by enemy states and non-state actors. They create a sense of hatred in young minds. This makes them extremists as well as terrorists. Hence the same minds should work

together and provide practical steps against misinformation and identity crisis.

Moreover, the media should play its constructive role in eradicating religious extremism. Media is considered as the fourth pillar of a state. It has ability to mould the opinions of individuals. Media is multi-pronged like print media, social media and many more. By using these platforms, principles of tolerance, patience and peace can be taught to masses. For example, the Muslim world should establish a news channel which will have international acceptance. At this platform, all scholars from different sects and debate on prevailing issues.

The religious scholars can send their voice to the whole world that Islam has nothing to do with extremism and terrorism. Through argumentation and statistical analysis, convince the international community that Islam is a peaceful, inclusive and flexible deen. In this way, masses will be able to acquaint themselves that Islam has no space for extremism, as mentioned in the Holy Quran, "there is no compulsion in the selection of religion."

Sum and substance of the whole discussion is that religious extremism and economic development are interlinked. Religious extremism sucks the blood of economy of Pakistan



just like zombie virus, it leads to low foreign direct investment, low local investment, hard imaging, poor output from tourism and brain-drain. All of these factors are paralyzing Pakistan's economy. However, religious extremism can be exterminated by taking following measures like redesigning of the educational curriculum, establishing the writ of the state, disowning the extremist ideologies, eliminating gender discrimination, promoting rationalism, combating identity crisis and many more. When the religious extremism will be eliminated, Pakistan will prosper economically. It will become a welfare state.