# **Moonis Ahmar**

## Abstract

The surge of religious extremism in Pakistan is not a new phenomenon and it got an impetus after 9/11. Back to back events like the U.S led war in Afghanistan; frequent drone attacks in the tribal areas of Pakistan; the Red Mosque operation of July 2007 against religious extremist elements; military operation in Swat and North and South Waziristan deepened the level of religious anger, antagonism, intolerance, violence and terrorism. Yet, extremism, whether religious, political or ethnic existed even before 9/11 but its scope and intensity was limited. Religious extremist groups got an impetus during the martial law regime of General Zia-ul-Haq because of the free hand which was given to those who preached their own brand of Islam under the pretext of Shariah and coerced others to adhere to their way of life. Hence, there is a greater degree of contrast between extremism which existed in Pakistan before the Afghan Jehad and after, as militancy and intolerance before 1979 existed but it was in a low profile whereas after 1979 it permeated in the societal structures and even state institutions couldn't escape from the ramifications and the surge of extremism. The proliferation of inter and intra sectarian violence in the backdrop of Afghan Jihad sharply divided Pakistani society and unleashed a cycle of violence resulting into colossal physical losses.

## Keywords: Extremism, radicalization, Pakistan

#### Introduction

One plausible way to deal with the menace of extremism, whether religious, sectarian or ethnic is by following an enlightened approach and thinking particularly on the part of those who wield power. Enlightened approach means a way of thinking which is broad and based on reasoning. Furthermore, enlightenment, which emerged as a movement in parts of Europe during 17th and 18th centuries led to scientific innovations, individualism, moderation and tolerance. The movement of enlightenment adequately dealt with decades of religious wars in Europe which ultimately led to the separation of Church and State as envisaged in the treaty of Westphalia in 1648. Viewed in the context of Pakistan where religious extremism and fanaticism seem to destabilize state and society of the country, such issues can effectively be dealt when an enlightened approach based on reasoning, rationality, moderation and tolerance is pursued at the societal level. Certainly, it is through the culture of reasoning, research and better education that the minds of people are opened and discourse and debate launched instead of conformity to established norms.

<sup>\*</sup>Author is Meritorious Professor, International Relations and Former Dean, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Karachi

This paper will examine the linkage between enlightenment and countering religious extremism by responding to following questions:

What is enlightenment and how it impacted on the cultural and political landscape of Europe?

How enlightenment can help reduce the level of extremism in Pakistan?

What are the impediments in a way for the culture of enlightenment to take its roots in Pakistan?

What is the future of enlightenment in Pakistan?

Furthermore, the paper will also dwell on the importance of education, promoting the culture of purposeful research and tolerance while pursuing enlightenment in order to deal with the menace of extremism in the country.

# What is enlightenment?

History is replete with examples to prove the existence of extremist and enlightened forces side by side. Both are as old as human history but their role in modern era needs to be examined in detail. Both will continue to negatively and positively influence societal trends and patterns in Pakistan and outside. A brief expression of definitional side of enlightenment and extremism will help understand the relevance and linkage of the two in augmenting the process of social change and development in a society which is still highly conservative and socially backward.

According to Oxford Dictionary and Thesaurus, enlightenment means, "18th century philosophy emphasizing reason and individualism rather than tradition." (The Oxford Dictionary & Thesaurus, 1995). According to Merriam Webster Dictionary enlightenment means, "a philosophical movement of the 18th century marked by a rejection of traditional social, religious, and political ideas and an emphasis on rationalism." Enlightenment is defined in Cambridge Dictionary as, "the period in the 18th century in Europe when many people began to emphasize the importance of science and reason, rather than religion and tradition." According to the Free Dictionary enlightenment was an "18th century philosophical movement stressing the importance of reason and the critical reappraisal of existing ideas and social institutions."

In an article "Enlightenment and Reason" published in Journal of Philosophy, it is argued that, "it is no accident that the Enlightenment period, roughly the eighteenth century, is widely known as the Age of Reason. We find here the continued rise of the

idea of independent reason which surpasses all forms of superstition, unexamined presuppositions, and dogmatism, especially religious and other arguments from authority. It has been suggested that the movement set in motion by the Protestant Reformation was translated into the philosophical realm through Kant's critical philosophy, which, arguably, culminates in Hegel's system. So Heine, a great poet but also a student of Hegel, argued that in Hegel's thought the circle is closed which began with the rise of the principle of independent reason" (Rockmore, 1987). In an article entitled "Kant's Rhetoric of Enlightenment" published in The Review of Politics, it is maintained by Michael Clarke that, "for enlightenment of this kind, all that is needed is freedom. And the freedom in question is the most harmless of all-namely, to make public use of one's reason in all matters. Kant's advocacy of freedom in the public use of reason is familiar to most readers of his moral and political philosophy. Yet the exact status that this freedom occupies in his thought is a matter of some dispute. "An Answer to the Ouestion: What is Enlightenment?" contains Kant's most well-known defense of freedom in the public use of reason. The title is somewhat misleading, since Kant's purpose is less to define enlightenment than it is to defend philosophy against the charge that it threatens moral order and political authority. Thus, while the essay begins by boldly defining enlightenment as humanity's coming-of-age, the bulk of it is devoted to defending freedom in the free public use of reason as the means of enlightenment. This strategy makes sense, given the context in which the essay was written. Political and Philosophical disputes over the possibility and limits of popular enlightenment were of considerable interest to Kant and his to and his contemporaries. " (Clarke, 1997).

Furthermore, "enlightenment is associated with scientific method, an experimental method that grounds itself in the suspension of belief and the cultivation of both doubt and openness. In theory at least, the scientific community is open, truth-committed, and unresponsive to previous." William B. Warner argues that, over the past 60 years, scholars have developed different answers to Immanuel Kant's famous question, "What is Enlightenment?" The enlightenment has been understood as a distinct epoch in the history of ideas; as the period where new science and new technologies achieved their distinctive modern influence; as an event in the history of media and mediation; as the first modern period to embrace skeptical critique as a settled intellectual stance; as the time when the modern public sphere emerged to challenge political absolutism; as the first epoch to grasp its own historicity and undertake a "history of the present" (Warner, 2013).

From the above definitions two conclusions could be drawn. First, enlightenment was a movement which began in Europe during 18th century to focus on reasoning and science instead of dogmatism and retrogression. Second, the age of enlightenment had the contributions from renowned philosophers who provided a sense of direction and vision to emancipate people from the clutches of religious fanaticism and absolutism of the monarch.

After the age of Renaissance followed by geographical discoveries, parts of northern and western Europe were influenced by the ideas of philosophers like, Immanuel Kant, Johan Wolfgang von Goethe, Francois-Marie Arouet Voltaire, Jean Jacques Rousseau and Adam Smith. Four factors which shaped enlightenment and drive for an enlightened approach three centuries ago needs to be examined. First is the emphasis on reason and rationality following the religious wars in Europe during 16th century. The movement of reformation led by Martin Luther challenged the absolute power of Pope and Clergy and argued for the separation of Church and State. Challenging Pope and Clergy brought far reaching changes leading to thirty years war (1618-1648) and culminating into the Treaty of Westphalia. In fact, the movement of reformation and enlightenment shared common purpose i.e. the induction of realism and rationality while dealing with religious matters. By separating Church from State after the Treaty of Westphalia of 1648, it become clear that dogmatism and ignorance will not shape the minds of people as Europe was moving towards the age of colonization, imperialism, innovation, inventions and industrial revolution.

Second, enlightenment promoted the culture of science, innovation and discoveries. Back to back events taking place in the western, northern and central parts of Europe starting from Renaissance and geographical discoveries promoted the movement of enlightenment. Scientific thinking based on reasoning and innovation established a chain of universities and centers of knowledge and learning in different parts of Europe and later on in the newly discovered America. When social awakening and emancipation from centuries of dogmatism emerged as established norms in European societies, tolerance, moderation and democratic thinking also emerged as significant pillars of enlightenment. Third, along with reasoning, rationality and scientific innovation, individualism emerged as a major phenomenon in the age of enlightenment. While breaking the clutches of social backwardness, individualism called for freedom and non-interference in the personal lives of people. That individuals possess the right to live their own lives without any interference and exploitation was the essence of individualism.

Finally, enlightenment promoted the culture of research and investigation in order to give an impetus to scientific innovation and discoveries. Probe, inquiry, doubt, exploration, fact finding and discovery became major tools of the culture of research in the age of enlightenment. The logical conclusion of enlightenment was the philosophical breakthrough in promoting the ideologies of liberalism and democracy in Europe and then throughout the world. The age of enlightenment clicked because it later on paved the way for industrial revolution and spreading the influence of European ideologies in what later on came to be known as the Third World.

If seen in the context of Pakistan, the very concept of enlightenment doesn't match with the ground realities of the country. In a society where religious conservatism shapes social and cultural landscape of the country and the level of tolerance, moderation and modernization is at its lowest ebb, one cannot expect people who are in a majority to be enlightened in their thinking and approach. Following are the ten realities that must be taken into account while analyzing the scope of enlightenment in Pakistan.

Pakistan is a religious state where it is not possible to question the role and authority of clergy. Questioning and reasoning about religion is not permitted. Pakistani society is highly conservative where scientific reasoning about questioning the subservient role of women is not endorsed. There are only a handful of enlightened people in Pakistan located in urban areas who question religious orthodoxy particularly in rural areas but fear of being implicated in blasphemy laws.

Rational interpretation of religious matters is not permitted along with the question of reforming those religious practices which do not conform to reasoning. No government in Pakistan can take the risk of enlightening the minds of people as it fears backlash from the clergy. Enlightenment is equated with westernization and contrary to the teaching of Islam.

The culture of research, which is a fundamental pillar of enlightenment, is still in its nascent stage thus diminishing the possibilities of probe, inquiry, doubt, exploration, fact finding and investigation on issues which promote and deepen religious extremism and fanaticism.

Religious schools called as Madrassahs instead of opening the minds of students by inculcating reasoning and rationality are in fact controlled by those who are against scientific knowledge and research to mitigate social backwardness.

Political parties lack the courage to challenge dogmatism and ultra-conservatism in society. Pakistan is still a hostage of feudal and authoritarian mindset which rejects creativity and innovation, the two main pillars of enlightenment.

To what extent Pakistan has dealt with such realities and why in 70 years of its existence it has not been able to transform backward and conservative culture by taking steps to modernize education by focusing on opening the minds of people? Ten realities discussed above can also be termed as major impediments as far as unleashing the process of enlightenment is concerned. Even people who appear to be educated possess closed minds rejecting any social change which can question centuries old conservative and orthodox way of thinking and life. Resistance against enlightenment and social change still continues despite the pockets of modernization. Consequently, Pakistan like many Muslim countries is far from enlightenment and it will take several decades for this country to break the tutelage of those forces that are resistant to reasoning, rationality, science and research.

# The Menace of Extremism

Extremism is as old as human history. It is termed as a negative concept because of its lethal characteristics to instigate chaos, disorder and violence in society. The surge of extremism in Pakistan has much to do with the events unfolding after 9/11 because of anti-American sentiments and the U.S drone attacks in the tribal areas of Pakistan. Extremism is opposite to enlightenment and flourishes in a situation when the society is deeply polarized, closed and economic and social backwardness result into unemployment and poverty.

According to the Macmillan English Dictionary extremism is, "tendency to have political or religious ideas that are considered extremely unreasonable by most people." (Macmillan English Dictionary For Advanced Learners Oxford, 2002). In the Safire's Political Dictionary extremism has been defined as "a position at the either end of the ideological spectrum and home of politically far-out." The Greenwood Encyclopedia of International Relations defines extremism as, "immoderation in policy or in one's intellectual political, or social opinions and judgments" (Cathal, 2002). Oxford English Dictionary defines extremism as "opposed to moderate." In a book, Extremism and the Internet by Peter Brophy, Jenny Craven and Shelagh Fisher, extremism is defined as "an individual or group's willingness to promote their cause by violence and by the denial of fundamental human rights to others" (Peter, Jenny, & Shelagh, 1999). Marriam-Webster dictionary defines extremism as, "it is a

behavior or beliefs of extremists." In a book Political Extremism and Rationality edited by Albert Breton et.al, extremism has been defined as "political extremist could be defined as one who uses extremist method, for example bombings, inflammatory language, terrorist activity, and so forth, but whose platform is or may be centrist rather than extremist in political (left-right) space" (Berton, 2002). Nobel Laureate from South Africa, Archbishop Desmond Tutu defines extremism as: "when you do not allow for a different point of view; when you hold your own views as being quite exclusive; when you don't allow the possibility of difference. When extremism starts to have a political end, for example to force governments to the table of negotiations for to some changes in their policies. It starts to become synonymous with radicalization."(http://theplayhouse.org.uk/tapestry/category/background/what-is-extremism/ accessed on January 31, 2011). In its essence, an extremist is created as a result of a process which has the characteristics like: sense of deprivation, intolerance, close mindedness, anger, antagonism, aggression and irrationality.

The youth of Pakistan is highly vulnerable to extremism because of underdevelopment of society which generates frustration. Religion and ethnicity are two major tools which are used to generate the feelings of ethnicity and in case of Pakistan societal contradictions provide a fertile ground to radicalize the youth. Extremism and enlightenment are poles apart but their link in case of Pakistan can be established because of four major reasons. First, an enlightened person will never express intolerance and impose his/her views on others. In case of Pakistan, the social upbringing in a society which is ultra-conservative, authoritarian and backward provides space to people who lack reasoning and rationality. Furthermore, enlightenment lacks grassroots support because of the deep rooted influence of clergy in shaping perceptions particularly in the rural areas of Pakistan. Since majority of the population of Pakistan lives in rural areas, clergy is able to establish strong influence. Extremism flourishes in a society which is inward and close and the absence of discourse, debate, reasoning and rationality in Pakistan is a perfect case study to examine how the menace of extremism can be curbed if a process of enlightenment is unleashed. Second, since extremism leads to radicalization, violence and terrorism, Pakistan's predicament is how to neutralize those forces who take advantage of ignorance and social backwardness of people and try to establish their own way of life. It there had been a process of enlightenment in Pakistan, Swat wouldn't have been taken over by the religious extremist groups in 2007; Federally Administration Tribal Areas (FATA) wouldn't have become a sanctuary of terrorists and sectarian violence resulting into countless killings and injuries. That millions of people wouldn't have been displaced as a result of military operation in Swat, North and

South Waziristan. Since 9/11 more than 70,000 people have been killed in Pakistan as a result of terrorist activities particularly the launching of hundreds of suicide attacks. Pakistan's failure to promote the culture of reasoning is a single major cause of extremism, radicalization, violence and terrorism. Third, the elites of Pakistan, whether belonging to the state or outside are also to be held responsible for their failure to neutralize the forces of extremism, particularly those who use religion for their vested interests. In fact, the negligence of elites particularly those controlling the instruments of power in eradicating social and economic backwardness also provided space to extremist elements. The weak justice system, absence of the rule of law and bad governance also made things easier for the surge of extremism. The elites of Pakistan looked the other way when since the last several decades religious extremism became a reality and a menace threatening societal peace and stability. Finally, the link between extremism and enlightenment is established when the former is able to influence the youth thus denying free thinking based on reasoning. For instance, those arrested on the charges of violence and terrorism confess that they became extremist because of motivation from the so-called religious groups. The rise of Jehadi culture in Pakistan since the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan also gave an impetus to the phenomenon of religious extremism. Motivation and appeal for a religious cause at the expense of sacrificing their lives is not neutralized by the so-called secular and liberal groups in Pakistan. Except during the regime of General Zia-ul-Haq which was known for its Islamist characteristics by unleashing the process of 'Islamization' in the country, most of the regimes have been moderate and liberal. But their failure to rein in extremist elements from society has much to do with their weaknesses and inability to deal with the causes which promote extremism, radicalization, intolerance, violence and terrorism in society. If the religious extremist groups are connected with the mainstream rural and urban society of Pakistan, such was and is not the case with moderate, liberate and secular groups of the country.

Class contradiction is another major reason for promoting extremism as the lower and lower middle strata of society is influenced by extremist religious groups who with the support of chain of Madrassahs provide food and shelter to students thus addicting their minds with the seeds of sectarian hatred and intolerance against other religious minorities. Mess in the educational system of Pakistan which again reflects class contradiction is also a cause of giving space to extremist elements. When around 25 million children are out of school and educational institutions are divided into government, semi-private, private, elite and religious schools, how can one expect the younger generation of Pakistan to be enlightened?

Enlightenment can certainly mitigate extremism prevailing in Pakistan by three ways. First, an open minded person with articulation and reasoning will not come under the influence of hard line, rigid, parochial and intransigent thinking. One can easily make out a difference between an enlightened and an extremist person in terms of body language and way of arguments. An enlightened person will not impose his or her views on others but will try to convince through arguments. Such is not the case with an extremist person because of the absence of reason, rationality and dialogue while trying utmost to impose his/her point of view. Second, the culture of reading is not to be seen as far as Pakistani society is concerned where the majority is not exposed to materials which can open the minds of people and inculcate moderation. If a society is a knowledge friendly society, certainly there is enormous scope of enlightenment and the mitigation of extremism. Knowledge friendly society evolves as a result of a process of reading and an intellectual discourse based on reason which is not to a large extent a case as far as Pakistan is concerned. Had this not been the case, the surge of extremism, intolerance, radicalization, violence and terrorism wouldn't have taken place and thousands of people wouldn't have blocked communication lines in the federal and provincial capitals by their sit-in demanding the resignation of Federal Ministry of Parliamentary affairs on the issue of Khatam-e-Nabuwat (finality of the last Prophet) last year November.

When state becomes a hostage of extremist groups and surrenders to their demands despite the orders of Islamabad High Court and the Supreme Court given to the city administration to end sit in by Tehrek-e-Labaik, it means the society is not enlightened. In an enlightened society demands are presented but a legal and civilized way is adopted instead of road blockade and harassing local people. Third, the culture of enlightenment deepens the sense of tolerance to listen dissent which is not the case with an extremist. Tolerance is the key as far as unleashing the process of enlightenment is concern. And tolerance is inculcated in the minds of people through a process of social learning and better education.

#### Impediments

What are the impediments in a way for unleashing the process of enlightenment in Pakistan particularly in the context of cultural transformation and how such obstacles could be removed?

It is not religious extremism which is perceived as a major impediment in terms of enlightenment, the feudal and tribal culture of Pakistan is also a foremost obstacle as far as reasoning, moderation and innovation is concerned. Pakistan is culturally and

lingually a diverse country but what is problematic in the cultural landscape of the country is deep rooted conservative way of life which discourages people to think independently and rationally. The class structure of the country also helps sustain the conservative and backward way of life at least in the rural countryside. Even in urban areas, there are pockets of progressive, liberal and enlightened people but they are surrounded by those whose way of thinking is narrow. Therefore, it means, if culture and religion are used by the conservative segments of society to prevent any thinking which can reflect broadmindedness and reasoning, the scope of enlightenment narrows.

In a situation when lynching of a 23 year old student Mashal Khan on April 13, 2017 in Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan in Khybar Pakhtunkhwa (KP) province of Pakistan takes place on the allegations of blasphemy it means there are people in large numbers who take law into their own hands and act without any logical reason. It is not only the case of Mashal Khan who became a victim of the menace of extremism in Pakistan, there are countless cases ranging from honor killings to religious persecution of minorities. The killing of the then Governor of Punjab Salman Taseer by his police body guard Mumtaz Qardi on the suspicion of blasphemy in January 2011 in Islamabad is another example of how extremism has permeated in Pakistani society. One can figure out two major reasons why incidents like Salman Taseer and Mashal Khan take place. First is the role of state and its institutions in establishing the rule of law and justice system. The absence of justice system, rule of law and good governance means the state cannot control those elements who take law into their own hand as was witnessed during the sit-in of a religious group Tekrek e Labaikh in Islamabad in November 2017. Even if the state authorities are enlightened they lack the courage to enforce the rule of law and rid the country of the menace of extremism, it would mean the failure of state. Second, there is tolerance at the societal and even at the state level to accept those people who openly preach hate in society on religious and sectarian groups. Those people who kill or target others because of their moderate and rational views get away and the society instead of isolating them provides space to continue with their extremism.

#### **Future of enlightenment**

It will take Pakistan several decades to transform from a highly conservative to an enlightened society because as it is mentioned earlier, it is not a segment of clergy which is against freedom and reasoning as a way of life, but at the societal level also there is strong resistance to promote debate on issues which tend to sustain an environment based on parochial and inward thinking.

While the silent majority in Pakistan is not extremist or fanatic, yet it is unable to prevent those who take law into their own hands in the name of religion. As argued by Hassan Abbas in his book, Pakistan's Drift into Extremism Allah, the Army and America's War on Terror that, "the silent majority in Pakistan wants the country to be a moderate and progressive state. But the problem is that this segment of society is silent. Civil society at large has failed to stand up to the extremist forces" (Abbas, 2005). Things would have been different in Pakistan if the silent majority had been assertive, educated, enlightened and moderate.

Within the fold of silent majority there are three types of people. First, those who are liberal, moderates, progressive and enlightened. In view of violence and terrorism unleashed by the extremists, they have withdrawn and do not take a position against those who have taken law into their own hands in order to what they call the enforcement of 'Shariah' in the country. The second type of silent majority is composed of those who are conservatives but not fanatics. They form a large segment of population; they are religious but not violent in their expressions. They believe in democracy and elections. They also follow the Sufi culture and believe in peace, tolerance and tranquility. The third type of silent majority are those who possess strong feelings about religion and dislike liberal and modern way of life. Believing in preaching of Islam according to its strict principles they are however not violent or fanatics. They consider songs and music as unIslamic and want females to adhere a strict dress code. In its essence, compared to the three segments of silent majority, a thin segment of minority is composed of those who are fanatics, violent and do not hesitate to use force in order to intimidate others in conforming to their way of life.

As pointed out earlier, as long as the culture of Pakistan is tribal, feudal and conservative, there is little likelihood of enlightenment taking roots in the country. Centuries of orthodox culture, ignorance, illiteracy and lack of better education for the majority of the population of Pakistan tends to limit the scope of an enlightened culture.

As far as the future of enlightenment in Pakistan is concerned, two possibilities exist. First, since extremism, intolerance, militancy, radicalization, violence and terrorism have reached their peak, an alternate to the forces of hate, anger and antagonism are enlightenment, moderation and reasoning. Pakistan can certainly turn around and get over the bitter past of extremism if the youths of the country follow an enlightened path. Since 200 million people of Pakistan cannot remain isolated from the world, they will have to defeat the forces of extremism. On these grounds, one can be hopeful about the scope and future of enlightenment in Pakistan where religion and ethnicity

will not be used by vested interest groups to promote hate and schism in society. Second, enlightenment, moderation and reasoning will not be able to marginalize extremism because of societal support which an extremist gets in the name of religion. Therefore, one doesn't see any hope to rid Pakistan of the menace of extremism, intolerance, radicalization, militancy, violence and terrorism in the near future because of the space which is provided by the society and state.

Be as it may, in prevailing conditions enlightenment cannot meet the challenge of extremism in Pakistan unless it has a constituency composed of committed and dedicated people with a cause to defeat the forces of bigotry and violence.

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