

The Historical Roots Of Religious Extremism And The Sanctification Of Individuals And Its Environmental Impact On Societal Disintegration And The Obstruction Of Sustainable Development

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the historical roots of the phenomenon of religious extremism (*ghulūw*) and the sanctification of individuals, and to analyze its comprehensive "**environmental**" impact on the disintegration of societies and the obstruction of sustainable development. The research examines the origins of extremism from the earliest human eras, beginning with the people of Noah, progressing through ancient civilizations and previous religions such as Judaism and Christianity, and culminating in the emergence of extremist sects in Islam, such as the Saba'iyya and the Khawārij. The study highlights how this phenomenon evolved and became entrenched over time, presenting prominent historical and doctrinal examples of extremism in the veneration and sanctification of individuals. The analysis focuses on the profound negative effects of this extremism on the social, intellectual, and psychological environments of societies. These effects manifest in the fragmentation of the social fabric, the stagnation of the intellect, the spread of ignorance, and the stifling of innovation, all of which directly impede the ability of societies to achieve comprehensive and sustainable development. The study asserts that understanding these historical roots is essential for confronting contemporary extremist ideologies, safeguarding societies from the destructive consequences of extremism, and ensuring the sustainability of their well-being in all its dimensions.

Keywords: Religious Extremism (*ghulūw*), Sanctification of Individuals, Historical Roots, Environmental Impact, Societal Disintegration, Sustainable Development, Extremism.

1. INTRODUCTION

Islam is the religion of moderation and balance, a principle affirmed in its foundational texts, such as the statement of Allah the Almighty: "And thus We have made you a justly balanced community that you will be witnesses over the people and the Messenger will be a witness over you" (Qur'ān 2:143). This noble verse establishes the principle of equilibrium and moderation as a fundamental characteristic of the Islamic nation (al-Qurṭubī, 1964). Islam has explicitly and clearly forbidden extremism (

ghulūw) in religion, as Allah the Almighty states: "Say, 'O People of the Scripture, do not exceed the limits in your religion beyond the truth and do not follow the inclinations of a people who had gone astray before and misled many and have strayed from the soundness of the way'" (Qur'ān 5:77).

Ghulūw, in its essence, is the act of transgressing the proper limits in all things (al-Azdī, 1987), and it is a grave and ancient affliction, as old as humanity itself. Historically, this phenomenon appeared as early as the time of Noah (peace be upon him), continued through Greek civilization, the Jewish and Christian nations, and into the Islamic nation; it persists in our present time in various forms and manifestations (Lassloom, n.d.). Extremism in the sanctification of individuals, in particular, represents a dangerous deviation from the moderate path to which Islam calls. It is one of the most significant challenges facing societies in every time and place, especially amidst the rise of extremist ideologies in the contemporary context.

The sanctification of individuals has severe consequences that are not limited to the doctrinal aspect but extend to social domains, negatively affecting human development and the sustainability of the quality of life. In this research, we will focus on the

"environmental" impact of extremism, which is not intended to mean only the natural environment in its direct sense, but rather the intellectual, social, and psychological environment of society. These environments are essential components of a comprehensive quality of life (Lassloom, n.d.). The intellectual and doctrinal disturbances caused by extremism disrupt the psychological well-being of individuals, weaken the social fabric, and impede intellectual and cultural development, thereby adversely affecting the sustainability of societal welfare. This research sheds light on the historical roots of this phenomenon and how these roots have contributed to the disintegration of societies and the obstruction of sustainable development.

2. Problem Statement

The research problem lies in the fact that the phenomenon of extremism in and sanctification of individuals continues to pose a significant intellectual and social challenge in contemporary societies, despite Islam's call for moderation and balance. Notwithstanding the vast intellectual and scientific progress of the modern era, groups and individuals still engage in excessive veneration of certain persons, elevating them above their human status to a degree that can verge on deification in some aspects (Lassloom, n.d.). This reprehensible sanctification, which has deep historical roots, leads to the stagnation of critical thinking, encourages blind imitation, and promotes absolute submission to the words and actions of these individuals, even when they contradict clear religious texts or sound logic.

The danger of this phenomenon is not confined to doctrinal deviation alone; it extends to directly threaten the

"environmental" quality of life in societies. Intellectually, extremism hinders the development of thought and innovation, leading to a cognitive stagnation that harms a society's ability to adapt and renew (al-Blaihi, n.d.). Socially, extremism contributes to accusations of disbelief (*takfīr*), division, and conflict, which fragments the social fabric and destabilizes society (Lassloom, n.d.), negatively impacting cooperation and solidarity. Psychologically, fanaticism and extremism engender hatred and animosity, disturbing the psychological peace of individuals and groups. These negative impacts obstruct any efforts toward sustainable development and comprehensive well-being. Consequently, understanding the historical roots of this phenomenon and how they have shaped these impacts is essential for discovering ways to protect the intellectual, social, and psychological environments of contemporary societies from disintegration and the obstruction of development.

3. Research Objectives

This research seeks to achieve the following objectives:

- To explore the historical roots of the phenomenon of extremism in and sanctification of individuals in pre-Islamic nations and in Islam.
- To analyze the historical causes and factors that led to the entrenchment and evolution of this phenomenon.
- To uncover the negative effects of extremism and the sanctification of individuals on the intellectual and social environments of societies.
- To highlight the role of extremism in the disintegration of societies and the obstruction of the path to sustainable development.
- To provide a historical-analytical vision for confronting extremism and its repercussions on the comprehensive quality of life.

4. Research Questions

This research attempts to answer a set of pivotal questions:

- What are the most prominent historical manifestations of extremism and the sanctification of individuals in pre-Islamic nations and in Islam?
- What factors contributed to the emergence and evolution of the phenomenon of extremism throughout history?
- How does extremism in individuals affect the intellectual environment of societies?
- What is the impact of extremism in individuals on the disintegration of the social fabric?
- How does extremism in individuals obstruct the path to sustainable development?

- What lessons can be learned from the historical roots of extremism to confront its contemporary challenges?

5. LITERATURE REVIEW

Numerous studies have addressed the phenomenon of extremism in Islam, although the focus on its historical roots and its comprehensive impact on the societal environment (intellectual, social, and psychological) and its effect on sustainable development still requires further in-depth investigation. These studies form an important foundation for this research:

- **Studies on the Historical Roots of Extremism:**

- *The Historical Roots of the Reality of Extremism, Radicalism, Terrorism, and Violence* by Dr. Ali ibn Abd al-Aziz ibn Ali al-Shibl. This study provides a broad historical background on extremism and radicalism, noting its various types and its evolution through the ages. It covers extremism among the people of Noah and its effects, extremism and radicalism among the Greeks and its effects, and then among the People of the Book and its effects. It also addresses the emergence of radicalism and extremism in religion among Muslims, their influence by preceding nations and religions, the extremism of the Khawārij and its main manifestations, the impact of the Rāfiḍa's extremism, the Jewish influence therein, and the radicalism of the Mu'tazila and its effects (al-Shibl, n.d.). This study is a key reference for the historical roots of extremism in general.

- *History of Greek Philosophy* by Yusuf Karam (n.d.) and *The Emergence of Philosophical Thought in Islam* by Dr. Ali Sami al-Nashar (1977). These works contribute to understanding the intellectual and philosophical contexts that may have contributed to the emergence of extremist ideas in ancient and modern civilizations.

- **Studies Specifically on Extremism in Individuals:**

- A master's thesis titled: "*The Sanctification of Persons in Esoteric Thought: A Doctrinal Study of the Ismā'īlī, Nuṣayrī, and Druze Sects—A Presentation and Critique in Light of the Qur'an and Sunnah*" (Dina bint Muhyi al-Din ibn Abd al-Hamid, n.d.). This study focused on a specific aspect of extremism, namely the esoteric dimension and how individuals are sanctified within these sects.

- "*The Sanctification of Persons in Sufi Thought: A Presentation and Analysis in Light of the Qur'an and Sunnah*" (Lūh, n.d.). This research highlights the manifestations of extremism in the veneration of saints (*awliyā'*) within certain Sufi currents.

- "*Manifestations of the Sanctification of Persons Among the Twelver Shia: A Presentation and Critique*" (al-Zahrānī, n.d.). This study addressed the dimensions of extremism in the veneration of the Imams among the Twelver Shia.

These valuable studies provide a deep understanding of the types of extremism and its roots in different contexts, and they highlight its repercussions on doctrine and society. However, they often focus on describing the phenomenon or critiquing it from a direct doctrinal perspective, or they address it within the context of historical sects.

What distinguishes this research from previous studies is that it does not merely present the types of extremism or its roots separately. Instead, it offers an in-depth analysis of the historical roots of the phenomenon of extremism and the sanctification of individuals, directly linking this historical development to its comprehensive

"**environmental**" impact (intellectual, social, and psychological) on the disintegration of societies and the obstruction of sustainable development. This new angle adds value to the scientific research, especially in the context of the growing interest in concepts of comprehensive sustainability that transcend the material dimension of the environment to include human and societal dimensions. The goal is to demonstrate how extremism, throughout its long history, has contributed to the erosion of the foundations upon which stable and prosperous societies are built.

6. METHODOLOGY

This research employs a dual methodology to ensure comprehensiveness and precision in analysis and inference:

- **Inductive Approach:**

- Historical and religious texts describing manifestations of extremism and the sanctification of individuals across different eras will be surveyed, starting from ancient civilizations and previous religions to the emergence of sects in Islam.

- This includes tracking the narratives and reports that document the earliest appearances of this phenomenon and its evolution.

- The sayings of scholars and historians specializing in creeds, sects, and heresiography will be surveyed to collect data related to the origins of extremist sects, the reasons for their emergence, and their doctrines.

- **Analytical-Critical Approach:**

- After collecting historical data through the inductive method, this information will be critically analyzed.

- This includes interpreting the historical phenomena of extremism and identifying the common factors that contributed to its emergence and entrenchment.

- The critical analysis will focus on highlighting the impact of this phenomenon on the intellectual environment of societies, and how it led to the stagnation of the intellect, the rigidity of thought, and a decline in innovation.

- The research will also critically analyze how extremism contributed to the fragmentation of the social fabric and the spread of division and conflict within societies.

- Most importantly, the research will discuss how these social and intellectual repercussions have negatively affected the ability of societies to achieve sustainable development in its various dimensions (economic, social, and intellectual).

This dual approach aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the historical roots of extremism, to uncover its mechanisms of influence on societies, and to highlight the comprehensive

"environmental" dimensions of this phenomenon and its repercussions on the disintegration of societies and the obstruction of development.

7. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

7.1. The Historical Roots of Extremism in the Sanctification of Individuals

The phenomenon of extremism in the sanctification of individuals is not a product of a modern era or a specific religion. Rather, its roots extend deep into human history, and it is a manifestation of deviation from sound human nature (*fiṭra*) and pure monotheism (*tawḥīd*).

7.1.1. Extremism in Pre-Islamic Nations:

- **The People of Noah (peace be upon him):** The story of the people of Noah is considered the first manifestation of the phenomenon of extremism in the sanctification of the righteous. It is reported in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* from Ibn ‘Abbās (may Allah be pleased with them both) in his exegesis of the verse, "And they have said, 'Never leave your gods and never leave Wadd or Suwā‘ or Yaghūth and Ya‘ūq and Nasr'" (Qur’ān 71:23), that these names were "the names of righteous men from the people of Noah. When they perished, Satan inspired their people to erect statues in their gatherings where they used to sit and to name them after them. They did so, but they were not worshipped until those people perished and knowledge was forgotten, then they were worshipped" (al-Bukhārī, 1422 H). This narration shows that extremism began with the veneration of the righteous after their death and then transformed into their worship with the loss of sound knowledge. These roots indicate that emotion not controlled by religious knowledge creates a fertile ground for extremism.

- **Jews and Christians:** Extremism manifested in Judaism and Christianity in various forms, most notably in the sanctification of prophets, rabbis, and monks. Allah the Almighty

says, "The Jews say, 'Ezra is the son of Allah'; and the Christians say, 'The Messiah is the son of Allah'" (Qur'ān 9:30). This is a claim of divinity or divine sonship for a created being. They also took their scribes and their monks as lords besides Allah by obeying them in making lawful what is forbidden and forbidding what is lawful (Qur'ān 9:31). The Prophet (peace be upon him) explained this by saying that they used to obey them in what they permitted and prohibited (al-Tirmidhī, 1975). These practices show that extremism in individuals is not limited to direct beliefs but extends to absolute submission to other than Allah in legislation, which forms a basis for the sanctification of persons.

- **Greek Civilization:** Despite the different context, some aspects of Greek thought, such as the philosophy of deifying heroes or sages, may show a human tendency toward extremism in the veneration of individuals, even if not strictly religious (Karam, n.d.). This aspect suggests that extremism can arise from a human inclination toward excessive admiration.

7.1.2. The Emergence of Extremist Sects in Islam:

Extremism appeared in Islam as an early current, influenced by certain internal and external factors.

- **The Saba'iyya:** The Saba'iyya are considered the first extremist sect in Islam. They emerged during the era of 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib (may Allah be pleased with him) at the hands of 'Abdullāh ibn Saba', who is said to have been a Jew who feigned Islam (al-Qummī, 1963). He claimed the divinity of 'Alī (may Allah be pleased with him), alleging that he was not killed but ascended to heaven and would return (al-Baghdādī, n.d.). This sect is considered the starting point for the sanctification of individuals within some sects affiliated with Islam, and scholars of sects from both Sunnī and Shī'ī traditions have agreed on its existence and danger (al-Dhahabī, 2003).

- **The Khawārij:** The Khawārij emerged as a formidable sect after the issue of arbitration in the Battle of Ṣiffīn (Ibn Taymiyyah, 1412 H). Although their extremism was not in the sanctification of individuals in the same sense as the Saba'iyya, they were extreme in their accusations of disbelief (*takfīr*), they rebelled against the Muslim community, and they killed innocent people (Ibn Ḥibbān, 1414 H). This type of extremism in rulings is rooted in a literal understanding of texts and ignorance of the higher objectives of Islamic law (*maqāṣid al-sharī'a*), and it highlights how extremism can take different forms but all of them lead to the disintegration of society.

- **Other Extremist Sects:** Other extremist sects continued to appear within Islam, such as the Bayāniyya, who claimed the divinity of 'Alī and Imam al-Bāqir; the Mughīriyya, who deified Imam al-Bāqir and al-Mughīra ibn Sa'īd; and the Khaṭṭābiyya, who claimed the divinity of Imam al-Ṣādiq (al-Shahristānī, n.d.). These sects, although the Imams themselves disavowed and cursed them, demonstrate the persistence of the human tendency toward extremism in the veneration of individuals and elevating them above their station.

7.2.3. Common Factors in the Entrenchment of Extremism Throughout History:

These historical roots point to several common factors that contributed to the entrenchment of extremism:

- **Ignorance of True Religion and the Absence of Knowledge:** As with the people of Noah, idols were worshipped when "knowledge was forgotten" (al-Bukhārī, 1422 H). Ignorance leads to a superficial understanding of texts and erroneous interpretations.
- **Uncontrolled and Fervent Religious Emotion:** Love for the righteous or the prophets, if not regulated by the limits of the Sharī'a, turns into extremism and sanctification.
- **Following Ambiguous Texts and Neglecting Clear Ones:** This is considered one of the main causes of misguidance in the Qur'ān (3:7).
- **Blind Imitation and Fanaticism:** Adhering dogmatically to a particular opinion or person and rejecting dialogue reinforces extremism.

- **Social and Political Factors:** Turmoil, conflicts, injustice, and the search for a "savior" or an "infallible leader" in times of crisis can drive some individuals to extremism regarding certain persons.

7.3. The Environmental Impact of Extremism on the Disintegration of Societies and the Obstruction of Sustainable Development

The phenomenon of extremism in the sanctification of individuals poses a real threat to the quality of life in its comprehensive sense, which includes the intellectual, social, and psychological environments of society, ultimately leading to the disintegration of societies and the obstruction of sustainable development.

7.3.1. Disintegration of the Intellectual Environment and the Stagnation of the Intellect:

Extremism in the sanctification of individuals leads to blind imitation in beliefs, ideas, and actions, which is a **تعطيل** (stagnation) of the role of the intellect with which Allah has honored humanity and made it the basis of accountability. When an individual or a leader becomes "above criticism and review," the spirit of competition, excellence, merit, and creativity dies in society (Lassloom, n.d.). Dr. Ibrāhīm al-Blaihi stated that "the sanctification of persons halts the growth of knowledge, hinders the prosperity of societies, and obstructs the march of civilization" (al-Blaihi, n.d.). This intellectual stagnation creates a stagnant intellectual environment that hinders critical dialogue and stifles innovation, thereby harming the ability of society to adapt to changes and solve contemporary problems. The stagnation of the intellect hinders the capacity for future-oriented thinking, planning for sustainable development, and creating innovative solutions to economic, social, and environmental challenges.

7.3.2. Disintegration of the Social Fabric and the Deterioration of the Social Environment:

Extremism in the sanctification of individuals contributes to the disintegration of the social fabric through several mechanisms:

- **Accusations of Disbelief (*Takfir*) against Muslims:** One of the characteristics of extremists is apostasy from religion and accusing Muslims of disbelief for major sins, or accusing those who disagree with them of disbelief, without seeking excuses or referring to the correct understanding of religious texts (Lassloom, n.d.). This behavior leads to the spread of hatred and animosity and the severing of kinship ties, which fragments society and hinders the collective cooperation necessary to face challenges.
- **Division and Partisanship:** Extremism is a primary cause of the emergence of heretical sects and parties (Lassloom, n.d.). This tears apart the unity of the nation, weakens it, and obstructs any collective effort for progress. A divided society cannot unify its efforts for the sake of development, nor can it formulate and implement coherent and effective policies in all fields.
- **Rebellion Against the Ruler and Destabilization of Security:** Extremism leads to accusing rulers of disbelief and rebelling against them with the sword, resulting in bloodshed, the destabilization of security, and the spread of chaos (Lassloom, n.d.). This security and social turmoil has devastating effects on the quality of life, as an unstable environment hinders any form of development.

7.3.3. Deterioration of the Psychological Environment of the Individual and Society:

The psychological environment for individuals in societies where extremism prevails is characterized by fear, anxiety, and insecurity. Accusations of disbelief and the suppression of dissent cause deep psychological anxiety. An individual who fears expressing their opinion or disagreeing with the sanctified figure lives under psychological pressure that affects their mental and emotional health and reduces their capacity for creativity and productivity. Moreover, the internal conflicts resulting from extremism breed hatred and animosity, which disrupts the psychological peace of individuals and groups and hinders the building of a tolerant and cohesive society.

7.3.4. The Obstruction of Sustainable Development:

Sustainable development is directly affected by the historical roots of extremism and its comprehensive environmental impacts:

- **Ignorance and Backwardness:** Extremism leads to the spread of ignorance and obstructs the growth of knowledge (al-Blaihi, n.d.). Ignorant and underdeveloped societies are less able to adopt sustainable practices in resource use, develop clean technology, or perceive the risks of environmental degradation.
- **Wasting of Resources:** The conflicts and disturbances resulting from extremism drain human, material, and natural resources. Instead of directing energies toward construction and development, they are squandered in internal conflicts, which hinders any progress toward sustainable development goals.
- **Absence of Future Planning:** Societies suffering from extremism and disintegration are often unable to plan for the distant future or adopt long-term policies to preserve resources for future generations because they are focused on resolving immediate crises.
- **Decline of Innovation and Scientific Research:** The rigid intellectual environment resulting from extremism discourages scientific research and innovation, which are crucial elements for developing solutions to complex environmental challenges such as climate change or water scarcity.

8. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study affirms that the phenomenon of extremism in and sanctification of individuals is not merely an individual or intellectual deviation, but a societal affliction with deep historical roots, having devastating effects that touch the core of human life and its sustainability. The analysis has shown that extremism transcends mere doctrinal error to become an impeding factor for comprehensive development and a threat to societal stability. By stagnating the intellect, spreading ignorance, fueling conflicts, and devaluing human dignity, extremism prevents societies from achieving their goals of prosperity and progress and diminishes their ability to deal effectively with contemporary challenges, including environmental challenges in their comprehensive sense. The Qur'ānic and Prophetic directives that call for moderation and balance, and warn against extremism, represent the theoretical and practical framework for confronting this phenomenon.

Sheikh 'Aṭīyya Muḥammad Sālīm said in his introduction to the book by Sheikh 'Abd al-'Azīz ibn Bāz about Sheikh Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb: "While some people glorify men of thought regardless of their orientations and exaggerate in commemorating them, perhaps even erecting statues for them, we Muslims do not sanctify personalities, nor are we swayed by currents. Rather, we have standards against which men and their works are measured, and according to the weight of their scale, they are granted esteem and status in our souls. These are the standards of da'wa (call to Islam), guidance, and the fields of reform under the umbrella of Islam" (Bāz, 1411 H). In this era where affliction has become widespread, social media is prevalent, the door to fame has opened, celebrities have multiplied, and extremism in and imitation of them has increased, there is a dire need to return to the Holy Qur'ān and the purified Prophetic Sunnah, for it is the balm for every wound, the cure for every disease, and the effective remedy for all forms and shapes of extremism.

Recommendations: Based on the findings of the study, the following are recommended:

- **Promoting Moderate Religious Education:** Educational and religious institutions must focus on curricula that entrench the concept of moderation and balance in Islam, highlight the dangers of extremism in individuals, and emphasize the role of reason and critical thinking in understanding religious texts.
- **Activating the Role of Preachers and Mosque Orators:** Preachers and orators should focus their sermons and lessons on warning against extremism and the sanctification of individuals, reminding people of the importance of correctly following the Qur'ān and Sunnah, and rejecting innovation and exaggeration in praising any person.
- **Utilizing Media and Social Networking:** In an age of information proliferation, digital platforms must be used to produce meaningful content that refutes extremist ideas, promotes the

values of moderation and coexistence, and highlights the negative effects of extremism on the individual, society, and the intellectual, social, and psychological environments.

- **Supporting Specialized Studies and Research:** Encouraging and funding more scientific studies that address the phenomenon of extremism from various angles, including studying its historical roots, analyzing its contemporary mechanisms, and assessing its impact on the comprehensive quality of life, including sustainable development.

- **Affirming the Relationship Between Moderation and Comprehensive Sustainability:** It is necessary to highlight how the intellectual, social, and psychological stability achieved through moderation and the rejection of extremism is an indispensable foundation for achieving sustainable development and preserving environmental resources in all their dimensions for future generations.

We ask Allah the Almighty to show us the truth as truth and grant us the ability to follow it, and to show us falsehood as falsehood and grant us the ability to avoid it, and to protect us from trials, both apparent and hidden.

9. ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The authors are thankful to the Deanship of Graduate Studies and Scientific Research at Najran University for funding this work under the Growth Funding Program grant code (NU/GP/SEHRC/13/821-3)

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