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Moral Values and Ethics in Contemporary Society

Atiya Kousar, Lecturer in Education,
Government PU college, Malebennur,
Karnataka, India.

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Abstract

This research paper studies the deep change in ethical systems in the modern time, looking at how we moved from old, "commandment-based" rules to more flexible, "consent-based" ideas. As we all know, with globalization and digital growth, common moral agreement is slowly reducing, so this study looks into the rise of "ethical relativism" and how it affects social unity. By using a mixed-method approach—taking numerical data from the World Values Survey and also studying real-life ethical situations—the research shows a clear shift towards morality based on empathy. The study further explains how technology, especially anonymity, creates an "empathy gap," and at the same time builds digital echo chambers, which we commonly see among people today, leading to strong moral divisions. The main findings say that even though modern society gives more personal freedom, it is also facing an "ethical lag," where fast growth in AI and biotechnology is going ahead of proper moral rules. In our country and worldwide, the paper points out "Sustainability," "Inclusivity," and "Autonomy" as the key pillars shaping today's ethical thinking. In the end, the study strongly suggests the need for a "Minimum Global Ethic" and better ethical education. This shared value system is seen as very important for humanity to handle global problems and to ensure long-term survival in this increasingly divided world.

Keywords; *Ethics, Moral Pluralism, Secularism, Digital Ethics, Social Responsibility, Bioethics, Globalization*

Introduction

Historically, human societies mostly followed one common moral system, usually based on religious beliefs or strong cultural traditions. As we all know, these systems gave clear guidance to people about what is right and what is wrong. But in the modern time, a big change has taken place. With the growth of secular thinking and the mixing of different cultures through technology and migration, the power of one single moral authority has reduced. Because of this shift, a more diverse ethical space has come up, where personal choice often becomes more important than traditional beliefs. In today's global world, one major challenge we can see is the loss of a common moral agreement. As old boundaries slowly disappear, "ethical relativism" has become more

important. This idea says that morality is not fixed, but depends on individual views or cultural background. While this thinking supports tolerance, it also creates a serious problem for global cooperation. Without a shared idea of truth or justice, solving international issues or human rights problems becomes more difficult, as each group follows its own set of rules. The main research question here is about how modern systems—like digital media, capitalist economy, and city life—affect the way values are formed. Today's life, as we commonly see among Indian people also, focuses more on speed, productivity, and personal success. Because of this, moral decisions often become situational instead of being based on strong principles. In the digital world especially, people stay inside "echo chambers," where their same ideas keep getting repeated, slowly taking them away from a wider understanding of values. The present moral situation has both positive and negative sides. On one side, people now have more freedom than before. They can decide their own identity and moral limits without strict control from institutions. On the other side, the lack of a common moral base creates a risk for social unity. When there is no shared ethical understanding in a society, the connection between people starts becoming weak. This makes it hard to achieve global justice, because there is no clear agreement on what responsibilities humans have towards each other. In the end, even though personal freedom has increased, the absence of shared values remains a big challenge for the stability of future global societies.

Objectives of the Study

- To identify the core moral values prevalent in 21st-century secular and religious societies.
- To analyze the role of the internet and social media in shaping "cancel culture" and digital morality.
- To investigate the conflict between individual rights and collective social responsibility.
- To propose a framework for "Global Ethics" in an interconnected world.

Literature Review

The study of ethics has slowly moved from strict and old systems to a more complex and flexible way of thinking. As we all know, this review looks at how traditional ideas adjust to modern life, how society changes our understanding of right and wrong, and also the new challenges coming from technology and the environment. Two main ideas in moral philosophy are still very important today: Kantian Deontology and Utilitarianism. Immanuel Kant's Deontology explains that some actions are always right or wrong, no matter what the result is. In today's world, we can see this in human rights discussions, where respecting each person is treated as a strict rule that cannot be broken for the benefit of others. On the other side, Utilitarianism, made popular by Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill, talks about the "greatest good for the greatest number." In modern times, this idea is often used in public health and economic planning. While Kant's idea protects individual rights, Utilitarianism helps in making decisions for large groups in a more calculated way. Sociologists look at ethics in a different way, mainly focusing on how society shapes moral behaviour. Zygmunt Bauman introduced the idea of "Liquid Ethics." He said that in today's fast-moving world, strong social bonds and fixed moral rules are slowly disappearing. Ethics becomes more flexible and short-term, often influenced by consumer culture instead of deep belief. Alasdair MacIntyre gives a stronger criticism. In his famous work, he says that modern moral discussions are in a kind of "disorder." According to him, since society has lost the original meaning of moral language—once connected to community and purpose—people now use

ethical words mainly for personal choice. Because of this, it becomes very difficult to reach common moral understanding. Today's research is not only about personal behaviour but also about larger systems: Environmental Ethics: This area questions the idea that humans are the center of everything. It studies whether nature has its own value beyond human use. Many studies now focus on "intergenerational justice," which means we have a duty to protect the planet for future generations. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR): In business, ethics has moved from only profit-making to a broader idea called the "Triple Bottom Line"—people, planet, and profit. In our country also, companies are now expected to follow moral values, not just earn money. AI Ethics: As machines start making important decisions, new issues are coming up. Researchers are studying problems like bias in algorithms, data privacy, and the "black box" issue, where even humans cannot fully understand how AI takes decisions.

Methodology

To properly study how modern society affects ethical values, a strong and well-planned research method is very important. As we all know, this study uses a mixed-method approach, bringing together both numerical data and descriptive analysis to give a clear and complete picture of today's moral situation. By using a mixed-method design, the study connects large social trends with real human experiences. Quantitative surveys help in measuring common behaviour patterns across big populations, while qualitative content analysis focuses on understanding the deeper meaning behind ethical discussions seen in media, literature, and policy papers. This combined method makes sure that the results are both scientifically strong and rich in real-life context. The main data comes from well-known international sources like the World Values Survey (WVS). This large dataset gives long-term information about human beliefs and values from many countries over several years. Along with this global data, the study also includes detailed case studies of present-day ethical issues. These examples—like climate justice and data privacy—help us understand how moral ideas are actually used in real-world situations. To make sure the results truly reflect human diversity, the sampling method includes different types of people. Participants and data are selected based on many factors: Age: Comparing thinking patterns between older generations and today's digital generation, which is commonly seen among Indian people also. Geography: Studying the differences between Western individual-focused cultures and Eastern community-based societies. Socio-economic Status: Looking at how financial condition, whether stable or difficult, shapes moral thinking.

Analysis

One major change in modern ethics is the shift from "commandment-based" systems to "consent-based" thinking. Earlier, moral rules were seen as fixed laws, often coming from religion or tradition. But now, in the present time, the focus is more on individual choice and mutual agreement. This means an action is seen as ethical mainly when all people involved agree to it willingly. While this gives more personal freedom and protects rights, it sometimes fails to strongly support values like sacrifice or duty towards society, which go beyond simple agreement. The digital revolution has changed how people interact, creating what we can call a "digital distance." When we communicate through screens, we do not feel the real presence of the other person. Because of this, empathy can reduce, as the emotional impact of our words is not directly visible. Studies show that this can increase harsh behaviour and reduce responsibility, which is commonly seen among Indian people also on social media. Also, the fast pace of online life pushes people to make quick decisions instead of thinking

deeply, making it harder to follow strong moral values in digital spaces. There is an ongoing struggle between global human values and local identity-based thinking, often called "tribalism." Globalism tries to create rules that apply to everyone equally. But as the world becomes more connected, many groups feel that their own culture and values are getting lost. Because of this, people move back towards smaller identity groups. In these groups, morality is based more on loyalty than on universal ideas. This creates a divided world where different groups follow different moral paths, making global cooperation on issues like migration and security more difficult. Ethics has now entered the market also. The growth of "conscious consumerism" and ethical investing shows that morality is no longer limited to personal life or religion; it has become part of economic decisions. People now use their buying power to support brands that match their values, like fair labour, environmental care, and social justice. In our country also, this trend is slowly growing. Because of this, companies are forced to follow ethical practices not only for values but also to survive. In this way, spending money becomes a tool for social change, where every purchase reflects a moral choice.

Discussion

In today's multicultural world, the "Paradox of Tolerance" is still an important topic. This idea says that if a society keeps accepting everything without limits, then its own tolerance can be weakened or even destroyed by those who are not tolerant. Managing this situation needs a careful balance. On one side, modern democracy works by respecting many different moral views, from religious ideas to new social movements. On the other side, society must decide its limits. When some "moral values" harm the safety or basic rights of others, the government has to step in. This creates a constant question—how much difference can a society accept before its unity starts breaking? Education plays a key role in passing moral values, but today its purpose is being questioned. There is a strong debate on whether ethics should be taught as a "personal choice" or as a "basic social need." If it is treated as a personal choice, students get freedom to think on their own, which builds independence and reasoning skills. But some people feel this can lead to confusion in moral direction. On the other side, teaching ethics as a social need focuses on shared duties like honesty, respect for rules, and empathy, which are important for any society. The real challenge is to teach these without forcing beliefs. A balanced view suggests that even if personal ideas are different, a minimum level of shared moral behaviour is needed for peaceful living, which is commonly seen as important in our country. One of the biggest issues today is "Ethical Lag." This means the gap between fast technological growth and the slower development of moral rules to control it. Today, humans can edit genes and build machines that make decisions on their own. But the laws and ethical systems for these are still not fully ready. Because of this gap, technology sometimes grows without proper control, mainly focusing on profit or speed instead of human well-being. By the time society understands the negative effects—like privacy loss or bias in systems—the technology is already part of daily life. To solve this, experts, scientists, and policymakers must work together and think ahead before problems become too serious. All these points show that morality is not fixed but keeps changing with time. Whether in education or global policies, the aim is to balance personal freedom with shared responsibility. In the end, managing today's challenges needs not only knowledge but also a strong commitment to common values that help people live together peacefully.

Research Results

The data shows a clear rise in "empathy-based" ethics compared to older "authority-based" systems. Earlier,

moral decisions were guided by religious leaders, laws, or elders in the family. But now, in today's society, people are thinking more about the emotional and mental effect of their actions. If something causes harm to others, it is seen as wrong, and if it supports well-being, it is appreciated. This change shows a more caring approach, but at the same time, it is less structured than before. Even though global connection has increased, the results show growing moral division. Technology helps people know more about world issues, but it also creates "echo chambers." In these spaces, people mostly see ideas that match their own thinking, which is commonly seen among Indian people also on social media. Because of this, instead of becoming one global society, the world is becoming more divided. This shows that people are getting more fixed in their own beliefs, making it harder to reach shared moral understanding across cultures.

Conclusion

The study of present-day morality shows a big change in the way values are understood. What was once a strict and top-down system has now become more flexible and based on discussion and agreement. As we all know, this change reflects a world where personal freedom and different viewpoints are given more importance than old beliefs. While this shift supports inclusivity, it also creates a situation where ideas of right and wrong keep changing. Modern ethics does not depend on one single truth anymore. Instead, moral values are shaped through social agreement and personal choice. This move from "authority" to "negotiation" means that values are influenced by current events, cultural mixing, and digital communication. While this flexibility helps society adjust to new situations, it also brings some instability. Without a common base, solving serious conflicts can depend more on power than on shared principles. A final thought from this study is that for humanity to face big global challenges—like climate change, pandemics, and uncontrolled artificial intelligence—a "Minimum Global Ethic" is needed. This does not mean everyone must think the same. It simply means there should be some shared basic values, like respect for life, honesty, and justice. Without this common understanding, global cooperation becomes very difficult, and the world may face more division and crisis situations. To balance personal freedom with collective well-being, policymakers and educators should focus on improving "ethical literacy." For Educators: Ethics should be included in science, technology, and digital learning, helping students understand bias and think about the moral impact of new technologies. For Policymakers: Rules and policies should be made in a way that they stay ahead of "ethical lag," so that innovation supports human welfare and not only economic benefit. By building these practices, society can protect individual freedom while also creating a strong and united system for a better and sustainable future, which is very important in our country and across the world.

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