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A Study of Relativistic Theory of Ethics in the Light of Islamic Theory of Morality

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Abstract

Every civilization has a system of ethics that defines their values and morality. The basic concepts of "Good" and "Evil" are also derived from that system. This system of ethics gains its inspiration from the world view of that particular civilization. Islam, like all other religions, also give a complete moral code for its believers. Qur'ān and the *Sunnah* here is the only criterion for determining the basic principles of the Ethics of Islam and hence morality in Islam is objective as well as absolute. In the post-modern world however, the morality and value system that got endorsed by Postmodernist thinkers is relative and subjective instead of absolute and objective. Morality here is largely considered as relative as well as subjective and hence vary with change in time and space. It can also undergo through evolution and no act or concept can be judged here on some absolute criterion. This "Relativism" and "Subjectivism" potentially challenge all the traditional schools of ethics. This paper would study whether this relativistic theory of ethics have any compatibility with Islamic fundamentals regarding ethics. This research paper is based on descriptive method along with primordial focus on Moral Relativism.

Keywords: Epistemology, Islamic value system, Meta-narratives, Moral relativism, Postmodernism, pluralism

Introduction

It is self-evident that Islam is absolute in its values; and Qur'ān and the *Sunnah* are considered as the ultimate and absolute criteria for determining right and wrong. Furthermore, they provide a balance for all kind of judgements including moral judgments. From Islamic viewpoint man is a spiritual and moral agent and the sole purpose of his creation is to worship Allah who is his Lord and creator. The divine guidance given by Allah is pathway for man that would lead him to success; and deviating from this path would result in grave consequences in hereafter. *Shari'ah* is a set of dos' and don'ts that are inferred from the Holy Qur'ān and the *Sunnah* and it covers all the aspects of human life. These basic teachings of Islam form the value system that is valid and relevant to all the societies and for all the ages. It also provides the perspective that laid the foundations of forming Islamic civilization.

The ethics of Islam are part of a larger whole and is strongly connected with beliefs of Islam. The moral values in Islam are seen as a manifestation of one's *Imān* and his spiritual self. For example, *Haya* is an important moral attribute, it is said by the Holy Prophet that "*Haya* is part of faith."¹ As morality and faith appear to be linked here, the importance of the relationship of faith and morality can also be seen in the statement by the Prophet (PBUH) that "The best of believers are those whose morals are good." It is said in Qur'ān that prayer prevents the acts of indecency; the fast shields; and the fasting person is advised to abstain from obscenity. Fasting and Pilgrimage are

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¹<https://sunnah.com/riyadussalihin:125>: The Prophet (SAW) said, "Imān has over seventy branches - or over sixty branches - the uppermost of which is the declaration: 'None has the right to be worshipped but Allah'; and the least of which is the removal of harmful object from the road, and modesty is a branch of Iman."

although part of the system of worship, but it is evident that how strongly they are linked to morality. The distinguishing feature of this system is that it is absolute and beyond the change of time and space. Moreover, it is pathway that ensures success in this world and in the world hereafter. It is also seen as a practical way for living peacefully in a way that everyone's rights are fully protected.

The Western world, however, have gone through enormous changes in the past centuries and that brought about a complete metamorphosis of moral concepts. So, the morality is seen as a phenomenon that should be determined on the basis of reason and the authority of religion in determining moral judgments is completely rejected. The debates of existentialism and freedom resulted in subjective approach towards morality while post-modern philosophy emphasized relativism. The theory of Moral Relativism is a paradigm of morality in the western world that declares morality as a personal and subjective matter, and no one can condemn the other on the basis of some of his moral conduct until and unless it is harmful for the society. This concept of morality is in total contrast with all the religious discourses of the past. Islamic tradition is also very clear on this issue.

The 20th century came up with the globalization phenomenon that resulted in the westernizing of values and cultures. So Islamic societies all over the world, and ours is a no exception, came under the direct influence of modern and post-modern debates. So, a lot of new school of thoughts emerged in order to reconcile Islam with modernity. New terms entered in the studies of Islamic thoughts like Liberal Islam, Modern Islam, Reformist Islam, Islamism etc. An intellectual duel between traditionalists and modernists within the Islamic societies is prominent phenomenon of the 20th century. Initially, these debates were only limited to intellectual discourses, but with the passage of time extremist approaches entered and the societies started to polarize on the basis of the views of those extremist proponents.

This article would study the divergent debates and trends gaining popularity in Islamic societies and the critique of tradition upon it with special reference to morality.

2. Literature Review

Toshihiko Izutsu, in his important work *Ethico-Religious Concept in the Qur'ān*,² gives a detailed account of the foundations of Islamic value system and compared the pre-Islamic morality with the system given by the Qur'an. He studied a number of moral values that were present in pre-Islamic society and said that "the Pagan Arabs were in reality richly endowed with an acute sense of morality."³ With the advent of Islam, many moral values were endorsed while rejecting others. Thus, a new system of ethics and moral values came into existence in the light of divine guidance. This value system made the nucleus of Muslim civilization that started in Medina in 7th century AD and flourished in the next 1000 years in considerable parts of the world. Professor Izutsu devised a term "Divine Ethics" for this Islamic value system.⁴

Zia-ud-Din Sardar in his important work *Islam, Postmodernism and Other Futures*⁵ elaborated the challenges that all the religions including Islam have to face challenges posed by the narratives of post-modernism. Not only that the post-modern narratives cut the roots of absoluteness including religion but also refute the concept of any objective criterion for morality. As a result, there can be no absolute truth as well as an absolute system of morality possible. An atheist can be an ethical person but he has no objective criterion to verify his own view of morality.

²Toshihiko Izutsu, *Ethico-Religious Concept in the Qur'ān* (Lahore: Suhail Academy, 2005).

³Ibid., 49.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Zia-ud-Din Sardar, *Islam, Postmodernism and Other Futures* (London: Pluto Press 2003).

‘*No God No Good*,’ an important article written by William Lane Craig⁶, asserts that “Theism and naturalism are contrasted with respect to furnishing an adequate foundation for the moral life. It is shown that on a theistic worldview an adequate foundation exists for the affirmation of objective moral values, moral duties, and moral accountability. By contrast, naturalism fails in all three respects.”⁷ This article lays solid foundations for constructing a meaningful discourse of morality and values in atheistic world. This article although address the Kai Nielsen “*Why Should I be Moral?*” gives the view that:

We have not been able to show that reason requires the moral point of view, or that all really rational persons should not be individual egoists or classical amoralists. Reason doesn't decide here. The picture I have painted for you is not a pleasant one. Reflection on it depresses me ... Pure practical reason, even with a good knowledge of the facts, will not take you to morality.”⁸

If rationality doesn't guide us to morality then there must be some other basis for constructing a system of morality. The divine guidance is the only possible solution that can take man out of this chaos. It is evident from the above review that post-modernism as a successor philosophy of modernity has put a strong challenge to objective and absolute view of morality given by Islam.

Postmodernism is a movement which appeared in reaction of modernism. The main focus of modernism is the quest for truth and for progress while postmodernism emphasizes on relativity, creation of realities and instability of everything. The birth place of postmodernism is France and the main proponents of postmodernism are Jacques Derrida (1930-2004), Michel Foucault (1926-1984), Jean-Francois Lyotard (1924-1998), other philosophers of 19th and 20th centuries like Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914), William James (1842-1910) and John Dewey (1859-1952). However, it is widely considered that it was Nietzsche who was the first to propagate the post-modern ideals. He, in many of his writings is clearly seen as a relativist philosopher and thinker. His famous book *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*⁹ gives an account of his philosophy. He was also the originator of the famous dictum ‘*God is Dead*’¹⁰ which means that all the authorities over Man including the authority of the religion is a thing of the past. These words show that according to him there is no longer any credible, objective and permanent source for moral justification present. In his book *Antichrist* he divided morality into two versions; master's morality and slave's morality.¹¹ Another place he says, “there are no moral phenomena, only moral interpretations of phenomena.”¹² In this way Nietzsche was in the favor of perspectivism. J. F Lyotard says: “The language of science and the language of ethics and politics hold a profound relation and this relationship constitutes the cultural viewpoint of the West.”¹³

3. The Relationship of Religion and Morality

The term ‘religion’ owing to its panoramic dimensions is related to the matters associated with God and Man, that declare the creation as conscious and meaningful process and rejects the nihilistic worldview and it demands from its believers the performance of certain rituals and acts and to abstain from certain wrong doings. Many scholars and writers define this term in the sense of ‘binding’ which

⁶William Lane Craig, “No God No Good,” <https://www.bethinking.org/morality/no-god-no-good>.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Kai Nielsen, “Why Should I Be Moral?” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 21 (1984): 90.

⁹F Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (London: Dover Publications, 1999).

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²F Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin Classics, 2003), 108.

¹³J. F. Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington, (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

they expended as being bound through religion to God. In this particular connotation, it can also be considered as a cohesive force, which creates a link to God.

In Islam the Arabic word *Deen*, is used for describing the teachings of Islam as a whole. There are debates among Islamic scholars that Religion is not an exact synonym of *Deen* because *Deen* is far more comprehensive term than Religion and encompasses all the fields and aspects of human life. This view was propagated by many Islamist thinkers like Maulana Maududi, Dr. Israr Ahmed and others that Islam is a *Deen* that encompasses all the fields starting from an individual's personal matters to the matters of the state. In this context Islam is declared as a politico-socio-economic system. In this paradigm, the term connotes the struggle and hard work undertaken by the holy Prophet (PBUH) under arduous circumstances, to make the *Deen* Islam dominant in Arab.

This explanation of Islam is not a new one as in the traditional school of thoughts the debates related to society and morality were also included in the religious realm. Even the jurists classify the Islamic Jurisprudence in two types i.e. *Fiqh ul Ibadāat* and *Fiqh ul Muamlāt*. It is a fact that Muslim scholars over the years have worked for determining the basis of moral judgments under different headings such as sections of faith, decencies, virtues or simply under the name of morals. The negative values in morality are elaborated by Al-Qazwinin in his *Summary of Faith Sections*¹⁴, Al Zhabhi in his *Chief Sins*,¹⁵ and positive values are given in *Decencies* by Ibn Moataz and the book of biographies and Morals by Ibn e Hazam. In addition, Ghazali's *Ehya ul Uloom ud Din*¹⁶ is a comprehensive collection that encompasses all the major debates related to morality. Ibn Al-Qayem was also concerned in his book, *Passers Stairs*, to the values of ideologies, while on the other hand Al-Nawawi¹⁷ in his *Riyadh Al-Salihin* is concerned more with moral values; and Al-Shatibi¹⁸ in his *Objectives of Sharī'ah* divides them to necessary, need and promotion. During the contemporary era, there is Lutfi Ahmad who divided values in Islam under ten titles: Slavery values, human admiration values, faith values, integration values, guidance values, repentance values, moderate values, calling and prayer values, comprehension values, and selection values, while Abdul Qadir Hashim Ramzi said that values in Islam could be divided into materialistic, human, moral and spiritual. Yusuf al-Qaradawi has compiled a book that is comprehensive account of what is prohibited in Islam and what is allowed.¹⁹

This insight provides an introductory base that tells who morality unlike the modern western views is an integral part of the teachings of Islam. Whether written "Religion" or "*Deen*" is certainly a metanarrative that form a world view to see and prioritize the concepts. It also suggests certain reorganizations of society, which is bound to be conformed to the divine law. This sort of particular relation of confirmation and reformation is not only the peculiarity of religion towards ethics but also in many other areas. This type of idiomatic relationship can be found between religion and politics, economics, history, anthropology and many other fields. In short it can be said that Islam influence ethics in several areas. It gives a criterion of "Good" and "Evil" and "right" and "wrong". This divine criterion can exclusively influence to correct moral ideas, it can assure or rectify our understanding about our societies and ourselves.

The above discussion shows that in Islam the traces of relationship between ethics and religion are evident, in order to comprehend their mutual influence it is crucial to see that in both cases of

¹⁴Critical Examination of the Summary of al-Qazwini," 1550, <https://www.wdl.org/en/item/218/>.

¹⁵Al Zhabhi, *The Chief Sins* (Dar ul Kutub al Ilmiya, 2009).

¹⁶Al-Ghazali, *Ehya ul Uloom ud Din* (Lahore: Islamic Publications, 2006).

¹⁷Nawawi, *Riyad As-Salihin* - - Sayings and Teachings of Prophet Muhammad (صلى الله عليه و سلم), <https://sunnah.com/riyadussaliheen>.

¹⁸Shatibi, *Objectives of Sharī'ah* - accessed November 8, 2017, <https://www.islamicity.org/8569/objectives-of-sharia/>.

¹⁹Yusuf al-Qaradawi, *The Lawful and Prohibited in Islam* (Dar Al Taqwa, 2000).

religious anthropology and religious sociology_ a coiled structure of independence is present which is specifically based on the supremacy of the religion.

4. Islamic Absolutism vs Moral Relativism

The traditional Islam, is absolute in all its aspects and its concepts and doctrines are formed on the basis of revelation. Therefore, the room for relativism and relative truth is almost absent in that system of thoughts and the concept of personal Truth is a false proposition. Islam is convinced that the facts which derived only from human reason have certain limits and cannot transcend from the possibility of doubt and falsity in it. The concept of some universal values and principles developed on the basis of Divine revelation is not new in religious traditions. However, as a Muslim, we are a firm believer that it is the legacy of Islam which has a fully developed value system based upon the texts that are claimed to be absolutely authentic and not changed over time like other religious scriptures.

In Islamic tradition, revelation has always been given supremacy over reason. Where there is a proposition present through revelation then reason is not referred in this regard. This is because human intellect is not ultimate and it often deceives a person. Modernism gave an ultimate and inevitable position to human intellect and presented rationality as an ultimate truth. Like Postmodernists, Islamic thinkers cross-question this view before them (postmodernist thinkers). This discussion is also found in the thoughts of Imam Ghazali and Imam ibn-Tamiya. Imam Ghazali's criticism on Aristotle's logic with the use of his own (Aristotle) logical rules clearly shows that Ghazali considered the facts derived from intellect merely as illusion and an unreliable source for determining the meta physical realities. He had the view that the scopes of the universe and time are limitless, and the human intellect cannot apprehend limitlessness. Therefore, its observations and results derived from it have limitations.

According to the Islamic point of view, the headspring of the ultimate truth is Allah Almighty. He is omniscient and His knowledge is all encompassing. "Lo, nothing in the earth or in the heaven is hidden from Allah Almighty."²⁰ The same message is seen in *Al-Baqara*, "He knoweth that which is in front of them and that which is behind them, while they encompass nothing of His knowledge save what He will."²¹

Similarly, the facts which are the headspring of Ultimate Truth is the divine revelation from Allah Almighty and which manifested in the form of unequivocal *Sunnah* of His messenger are Absolute Truths. This is the sole criteria upon which all the claims of truth in this world are to be judged. If they are contradicting to Divine revelation, they are Absolute False; and if they are not contradicting, they would be judged true or false and right or wrong on the basis of previously known criteria. Hence only the orders and commands of Allah Almighty and the *Sunnah* of his Prophet (*SAW*) are innately right and true and all other judgments are to be analyzed upon this criterion. In practical life, Islam adopted this viewpoint in the matters of legislation and codification. It does not give a universal position to every matter like modernism and also does not reject universal rules and regulations like postmodernism. It gives universal status to basic rules and in the light of these universal rules and principles it opens the door of *Ijtihad* (process of legal reasoning and interpretation) through which the Jurist (*mujtahid*) derives law on the basis of the Qur'an and the *Sunnah* for particular time, particular place and particular situation.

Islam teaches the omnipresence of God that implies that the actual motivation behind abstaining from a Sin or wrongdoing is that Allah is seeing it and He would hold everyone accountable for all

²⁰Al-Qur'an: Al-e-Imran, 3:5.

²¹Al-Baqara, 2: 255.

of his acts. It is clearly asserted in Qur'an that nothing can escape from Him.²² This view rejects the doctrine that only that conduct is wrong which harm others. Moreover, *Khatam-e-Nabuwat* is a fundamental view in the philosophy of Islam. One implication of this doctrine is that the divine guidance has been completed in the personality of the Prophet and it is relevant and binding for all the people and nations that have come and would come till the Day of Judgment. So, there is no possibility of a change that claims about the change in the fundamentals of Islam as they were decided. The *Hālāl* and *Harām* that are given in the Qur'ān and the *Sunnah* are also final.

5. Individual Freedom, Human Rights and Islam

The contemporary world declares religious concept of morality as against the individual freedom of man. In lieu of this, Nietzsche declared the religious morality as morality of the slaves²³ because the attributes of humility and humbleness are more emphasized in it. It is therefore a hurdle in the development of high values and attributes in the personality of an individual. The concept of "existence precedes essence"²⁴ given by existentialists also declare individual freedom as the highest value that is to be achieved and anything that put a check on it or curtail it is to be rejected.

Basic focus of morality in Islam is the concept of success (*Falāh*) in this life and hereafter. Islam keeps balance between society and individual. It takes welfare autonomy and harmony of individual and society in balanced way. Religion just focuses with the conscience of the individual. It means religion has equal concern with the development, benefit and welfare of society as well as individual.

God has prohibited through his commands from the things and actions which are not appropriate for individual as well as for the society. So, the Muslims should abide by these commandments whether they understand its benefits or not. It can be understood by the example of the prohibition of interest on loan. The majority of scholars consider the social harms and economic exploitation as the reason behind the prohibition of usury. The prohibition of murder, theft, fraud and so on are necessary for justice in society. Similarly, the purpose of the prohibition of adultery is that it destroys family system. These types of limitations provide a peaceful and healthy environment vital for the development of individual. Moreover, the people who are performing good deeds in this world would be blessed hereafter. Absolute justice could be achieved through the output of good deeds in shape of paradise and hell would be given to the wrong doers. The Holy Prophet (PBUH) practiced all these Qur'ānic injunctions and was titled as '*Al-Amīn*' (the Trustworthy) and kept a sound foundation in ethics. There is also the existence of collective actions that are helpful for individual as well as the society and it cover all the aspects. It can be economic,²⁵ philanthropic,²⁶ judicial,²⁷ or armed²⁸ etc. In this way, only a good individual can progress a good and prosperous society. Thus, one can claim for a good society that can provide healthy environment for individual where he can perform right actions. These right actions spread in broader range and cover all areas of life and human activities including commerce and trade.

The concept of human rights in Islam is not because of recent western phenomenon but according to the Islamic jurists, it has more centralized position in Islam. Abul A'la Mawdudi a great Islamic scholar and revivalist argues that, "Islam has laid down some universal fundamental rights for humanity as a whole, which are to be observed and respected under all circumstances

²²Luqman, 31:16.

²³Fredrik Nietzsche, *Joyful Wisdom* (New York: The McMillan Company, 1924).

²⁴Steven Crowell, "Existentialism," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2017), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2017/entries/existentialism/>.

²⁵An-Nisa 4:29.

²⁶Al-Baqarah 2:177.

²⁷An-Nisa 4:58.

²⁸Anfal 8:60.

...fundamental rights for every man by virtue of his status as a human being.²⁹ Some claimed that current human rights are what Islam has enforced fourteen century earlier.³⁰ Some other Muslim scholars consider that Islam is not “inherently illiberal” and it cannot be “reconciled, at an abstract level of ideas, with the principles of human rights.”³¹ Contrary to these scholars, some claims that there is huge difference between the concept of Islamic rights and Western concept of rights.

One of the reason of Muslim scholars’ critique on the Universal Declaration is because it is giving secular concept of fundamental rights and showing its hostility with Islam.³² Abdulaziz Sachedina said on this point “the very secular foundation of the Declaration is deemed epistemologically insufficient to account for the derivation of inherent and inalienable human rights.”³³ Muslims were against the Universal Declaration from the very beginning due to its secular nature and other multiple reasons. Even participation of Muslim countries during the draft of declaration was minor. Only three Muslim countries, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Syria was the part of that committee. All Muslims members were “secularly educated individuals” and have no proper knowledge about “foundational sources of Islamic tradition.”³⁴ This was the fact that at that time Saudi representative was a Lebanese Christian and even Saudi Arabia did not cast vote in favor of Universal Declaration because its spirit was against Islamic law.³⁵

The main reason why Islamic concept is different from the Western concept of human rights is that all Islamic faiths are based on central belief which create difference that Islam does not endorse the difference between God and His obedience. The obedience of God has central position in Islam because directions of all rights are based on the concept of obligations and duties. The term of duty and obligation is quite natural and wider than the term of rights. Faith in oneness of Allah has fundamental position in Islam and all rights get its validity through the way of duties and obligations. When individual perform their duties and obligations, they get their rights through this way and those who are not acting upon their duties have no rights in Islamic *Shari’ah*. Main source of rights in Islamic society is individual itself.³⁶ “Thus, Islam stresses people’s obligations to society rather than their rights against government.”³⁷ Community has more importance than individual in Islamic society and the role of community in Islamic society is ‘a solid wall whose bricks are supporting each other.’ Islam emphasizes on collective good of society.³⁸ Islam is also promoting harmony, unity, fraternity and brotherhood of mankind through teaching that there is no difference between Arab and

²⁹Abul Ala Maududi, *Human Rights in Islam* (Leicester: Islamic Foundation, 1976), 10.

³⁰Syed Muzaffarud Din Nadvi, *Human Rights and Obligations in the Light of the Qur’ān and Hadīth* (Dacca: M. Zahirullah Nadvi, 1966), 14-15; and Sultanhussein Tabandeh, *A Muslim Commentary on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (London: F. T. Goulding and Company, 1970), 1, 8. Both the sources have been cited in Donnelly, “Human Rights and Human Dignity,” 306. 188; Faraz Anjum, “Human Rights, Cultural Relativism and Islam,” *Journal of the Research Society of Pakistan* 50, No. 2 (2013): 160-189.

³¹Katerina Dalacoura, *Islam, Liberalism and Human Rights: Implications for International Relations*, 3rd ed. (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007), 41.

³²Even the Roman Catholic Church was opposed to Universal Declaration. It was only the Second Vatican Council in 1965-1967 that the concept was accepted by the Roman Catholic Church. The Netherlands Scientific Council for Government Policy, *Dynamism in Islamic Activism: Reference Points for Democratization and Human Rights* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006), 135.

³³Abdulaziz Sachedina, *Islam and the Challenge of Human Rights* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 6.

³⁴*Ibid.*, 10.

³⁵Daniel E. Price, *Islamic Political Culture, Democracy, and Human Rights: A Comparative Study* (Wesport, Connecticut: Praeger, 1999), 158.

³⁶Abdul Aziz Said, “Human Rights in Islamic Perspectives,” in Adamantia Pollis and Peter Schwab ed. *Human Rights: Cultural and Ideological Perspectives* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1979), 92.

³⁷Price, *Islamic Political Culture, Democracy, and Human Rights*, 157; Faraz Anjum, “Human Rights, Cultural Relativism and Islam,” *Journal of the Research Society of Pakistan* 50, No. 2 (2013): 189.

³⁸Vincent, *Human Rights and International Relations*, 42.

non-Arab, white and black. Same conditions are valid for non-believers living in Islamic state and paying poll tax in exchange of all rights like protection of life, freedom and property and freedom of worship. Non-believers have liberty to practice their religious practices without any interruptions and hurdles.³⁹ Islamic state secures unique position and practices egalitarian outlook when it provides basic necessities to its citizens as its prime responsibility. There is a separate portion for poor and needy in Islamic state. Sustenance of poor are the prime responsibility of state.⁴⁰

6. Moral Relativism and Islamic Viewpoint

The fundamental characteristic of relativism is that there is no concept of absolute reality and truth. It rejects objective truth. Relativists claim that absolute truth is not existent. It is only the observer who perceives things according to his or her subjectivity and truth is according to his state of mind and observation. Therefore, Islam is not relativist in its spirit. Although, Islam permit others to spend their life according to their own ideology and according their own codes. Islam even tolerate those practices which it does not permit to its followers, hence the religious pluralism. But this is not relativism because Islam only allows it for non-believers and clearly give the ruling of *Haram* (forbidden) about them. Wine is strictly prohibited in Islam, but Muslims could not impose this rule to other members of community. For instance, Christians who are using wine for not only their personal use but also for their religious obligations. The state of Medina was governed under Islamic laws, but Jews of Medina were permitted to live their lives according to their own laws. But there were some exceptions adopted by Muslim state for religious minority as their status of a *dhimmi*. They could perform all their individual practices except those which can be harmful for general health and safety of the community. Islamic law provides absolute right of privacy to individuals and ensure security in their premises of private affairs and individuals are free from any intervention of the state.

It is a fact that Islamic teachings are inclusive and admit the needs of other members of society who are non-Muslims. Although, Saudi Arabia implemented the Islamic laws according to the *Wahabi* interpretations but there is wide space for non-Saudis where they can spend their lives according to their own laws. Even inhabitants of Saudi Arabia are free from any intrusion in their homes by the religious police. In this way, Islam is inclusive, and it will be a mistake to claim or adopt relativism for Islam.

This is the fundamental belief of all Muslims that God has sent his messengers to all mankind, but the only difference is that the people could not preserve the message of God and corrupted it. On the contrary, Muslims have firm faith that God has preserved Qur'an perfectly and it is free of any violations.

There are multiple and diverse shades and modes of life which are good and there are also certain and absolute objective standards that cannot be rejected:

To thee We sent the scripture in truth, confirming the scripture that came before it, and guarding it in safety: so, judge between them by what God hath revealed, and follow not their vain desires, diverging from the Truth that hath come to thee. To each among you have we prescribed a law and a way of life? If God had so willed, He would have made you a single people, but [His plan is] to test

³⁹Ibid., 43. For further study on diverse relationship between human rights and Islam, see, Shahram Akbarzadeh, and Benjamin MacQueen, "Framing the Debate on Islam and Human Rights," in *Islam and Human Rights in Practice: Perspectives Across the Ummah*, ed., Shahram Akbarzadeh and Benjamin MacQueen (London: Routledge, 2008); Mohammad Abed al-Jabri, *Democracy, Human Rights and Law in Islamic Thought: Contemporary Arab Scholarship in the Social Sciences* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2009).

⁴⁰Said, "Human Rights in Islamic Perspective."

you in what He hath given you: so, strive as in a race in all virtues. To God you will all return; it is He that will show you the truth of the matters in which ye dispute.⁴¹

It is reality that values are never relative, they are always absolute as the rule of honesty and fulfillment of contract in commerce apply to everyone without considering their religious beliefs. Therefore:

Among the People of the Book are some who, if entrusted with a hoard of gold, will [readily] pay it back; others, who, if entrusted with a single coin, will not repay it unless you constantly stood demanding, because, they say, ‘there is no blame on us [for what we may do] with these unlettered [outsiders],’ but they tell a lie against God, and (well) they know it.⁴²

Furthermore, all the legal contracts are considered sacred and holy despite the intention and faith of contracting party. Same is the case of Islam, Islam produces a social system with Islamic contractual relations. Muslim states had actualized the system of non-secular pluralism. It was based on *dhimmi* system. According to this system, minorities spend their lives under the protection of Islamic state and enjoy their own laws and regulations in their communities with the exemption that they could not perform military duties and Muslim state would provide them protection from external aggression in return. This is the way that the rights of other communities and non-Muslims are protected within an Islamic state.

Islam give absolute endorsement to some acts and values and give absolute rejection to other acts. These together form the list of *Halāl* and *Harām* in Islam. So, a religion with that much emphasis on the value system and with the detailed teachings cannot endorse relativistic concept. The teachings of Islam are absolute as well as upon an objective criterion, so relativism has no space in it in terms of judging the values. However, Islam gives space to non-believers to act according to their own beliefs; but this by no means inclined towards relativism as Muslims are completely aware that non-believer’s belief is wrong. Thus, Islam upholds a pluralistic stance rather than relativistic one.

7. Analysis of Different Shades of Moral Relativism

The concept of moral relativism is divided into three major types i.e., descriptive, epistemological and normative. One can describe descriptive relativism in terms of different moral codes that are followed in different societies different concepts of “virtue,” “Good” and “Evil” prevails and they follow diverse ideals. Descriptive relativism doesn’t find much controversy except the quantity of emphasis on diversity and difference and keeping all on the same plane. It implies that all are equal and there is no question of one’s priority over the other. Moreover, no criticism is possible on other’s values and morals. Islam cannot accept this and is exclusive in its approach. It gives clear ruling about matters that whether they are prohibited or permitted.

The second kind of moral relativism is normative relativism. The foundations of normative relativism are somewhat more haphazard as compare to descriptive relativism. It can be described in terms of attitude, because it demands complete passivity. To put this concept in concise words one can, say that, in the avenue of normative relativism, to pass any comment on one’s morals would be considered as wrong and improper. In its extremity, moral relativism demands that no one should pass any sort of verdict about other’s actions, beliefs, character or values. Although utmost form of normative relativism is dubious and almost every philosophic school is ready to defend it, despite of its flimsy nature it has gained much applause from the youngsters in west. However, it also seems that they are also not aware of it completely because they have recognized it as an offshoot of descriptive relativism.⁴³The basis of normative relativism is detrimental, mainly due to its postulates

⁴¹Al-Maida, 5:48.

⁴²Al-e-Imran, 3:75.

⁴³Emrys Westacott, “Moral Relativism,” *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <https://iep.utm.edu/moral-re/>

of neglecting the distinction between right and wrong, as well as justice and injustice. The opposite of normative relativism is another extreme, which allows everyone to pass judgements of any sort on other's ideal, beliefs and characters. Islam curtails this sort of extreme position; it states that there are several aspects of person's life that ought to be remained with God only and no one can interfere in it. But at the same time Islam give a clear concept of Sin that is an action of disobeying God. ⁴⁴

Epistemological relativism is another form of moral relativism which states that moral principles are dynamic they change with the change in the state of person, like it changes with how one thinks, believes and also on their schematas. Due to the extreme focus of epistemological relativism on person's thinking, his attitude, it has been associated with subjectivism, which somehow foreshadows epistemological relativism but not completely. Moral subjectivism is the claim that there is no objective morality. Thus, there is nothing, which universally affirms moral truths. Thus, subjectivity can be related to both individuals and society. They believe that right, good or virtuous is determined by the individuals or society and not shaped by some external force or religion. ⁴⁵

All the shades of moral relativism have a common attribute in them that they deny absoluteness and objectivity in moral judgments and theoretically place all relative concepts of morality at same plane. In this way the exclusivity and authority, that is the integral part of religious morality system, is totally rejected. This is the fundamental difference between Islam and all types of Moral relativism. In Islam the morality and the concept of "Good" and "Evil" is given by Allah and it is that much exclusive that no other way of life is acceptable by Allah. As mentioned in the Holy Qur'an at a number of occasions that Allah accepts only Islam as a way of living⁴⁶ and it is the sole authority of Allah to guide the people.⁴⁷ A misconception is created sometimes that there are religious people who hold some version of moral relativism. However, if it states that, right is to be measured by what pleases God and the authority lies with Him then it is not considerable as a form of relativism.

In a nutshell it is safely said that Islam's traditional position regarding moral judgments is very clear that it is dependent upon the divine criteria of Good and Evil given by Allah; and that is present in the form of Qur'an and *Sunnah*. Islam gives space to different opinions as well as it gives protection to everyone's privacy. But at the same time, it gives clear verdict about the criterion upon which everyone's conduct would be judged. This criterion is beyond time and space and is the only gateway for success in hereafter.

8. Conclusion

In a nutshell it can be summed up that man is the *Khalifa* of Allah on earth; and the sole purpose behind man's creation is to worship Allah. For the guidance of man Allah had always sent his messengers along with the divine guidance. The last edition of this divine guidance was concluded on Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and the last and complete comprehensive book was bestowed by Allah in the form of the Holy Qur'an. This book is now valid and binding for all the humanity up to the Day of Judgment; and both the Qur'an and *Sunnah*, are eternal criterion for judging right and wrong.

With this divine guidance Allah has also gifted man with an innate sense of good and evil. Qur'an appeals this inner self of man and ask him to meditate. The accountability of Man on the day judgment would be based upon the criterion of that divine guidance as well as upon the basis of this innate sense of good and bad to whom everyone is bestowed upon with. Moreover, man in his nature has positive traits and tendencies as well as some negative ones. It is obligatory for man to nourish

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Al-e-Imrān, 3:20.

⁴⁷Al-Baqara, 2:120.

those positive traits and culminate the negatives ones. The teachings of *Sharī'ah* are there to help a person to nourish those positive traits and eradicate the negatives from his life.

Moreover, this innate sense of “Good” and “Evil” although is a gift of Allah but it can be affected or polluted by external contaminations and some internal influences. It is therefore logical that the ultimate and final ruling related to right and wrong would be based upon divine guidance. The Holy Qur’ān with the practical example of the *Sunnah* of the Holy Prophet (*SAW*) is sole and ultimate criterion for determining “Good” and “Evil” and giving all kind of judgments.

Moral relativism, on the other hand, is the theory of morality that is endorsed by the age of modernity and postmodernism. It is founded on the base of two types of arguments. One is theoretical aspect that on the basis of philosophies evolving from renaissance to postmodernism reject all the traditional narratives including religious concepts of morality. The other aspect is practical and has arose because of the phenomenon of globalization that has shrunken the distances between different cultures. So, in order to maintain peace and harmony amongst the societies moral relativism is seen as a possible remedy. While it may guide the humanity to a certain extent, but can also result in the situation of moral dismay. This situation can result in the collapse of value system and decreasing the status of religious centers, which will in turn, create moral chaos in society which is not healthy for flourishing any society. By removing values and religious injunctions, moral relativists try to emphasize individuals to follow their own desires. So, in this way, postmodernists are destroying and deconstructing the value systems given by religions due to undermining conceptual structure and objectivity.⁴⁸

But it would not be an exaggeration if one claims that the idea of moral relativism has put a strong challenge to the orthodox as well as the religious concepts of morality; and the spirit of time that is under the strong influences of modernity and postmodernism, also is in favor of this concept. The rhetoric has presented it a possible solution that can bring harmony in the world but at the same time a huge danger of losing the absolute and collective grounds for all kinds of moral judgments is also attached with it that can result in the situation of a complete moral catastrophe.

Conflict of Interest

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