The role of sociality in deciding the morality involved in personal and professional relationships: with special reference to Indian culture

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Introduction

Generally, the word 'morality' is explained in terms of the codes of conduct proposed by a society and the moral norms set by a rational person. There is no exact definition for the term 'morality.' The word 'morality' in this context means what one ought to aim for, what sorts of obligations he or she should fulfill, what sorts of rights he/she is entitled to have etc. It concerns a person's goals or values, virtues or desirable qualities of character, obligations or duties and rights or justifiable claims (Prasad and Chattopadhyay, 2008). Defining moral norms always varies from one society to another and one culture to another. According to Parish, 'moral expereince' has social and cultural dimensions (2014). Similarly, religion has a significant effect on individual's opinion on moral issues (Finke and Adamczyk, 2008). Regarding personal relationships, morality is how one ought to act and what the right course of action is to one's parents, relatives, teachers, friends, spouse, fans etc. in a social set up, and in a professional relationship it is how one ought to act towards one's employer, colleagues, clients etc. Accordingly, one has various kinds of obligations – to respect one's parents, one's spouse, to take care of one's children and general obligations- such as the obligations to tell the truth, the obligation not to steal etc. (Kellenberger 2004). The author continues stating that the form of various sorts of obligations to particular persons is determined or clarified by the relationships that exist between people.

There are societies, where morality is deeply rooted in 'sociality' and it is reflected in almost all relationships (for example: rural Indian society). In such situation, morality depends on the religion, caste, class and other existing social institutions of the society in question. Here, society means a relatively independent, self-perpetuating human group which occupies a territory, shares a culture and has most of its association within the group (Horton and Hunt 2004). Though it is more prevalent among rural community members, there are members from urban communities who also behave in a similar way. Every human being possesses 'sociality' or the tendency to associate with others as one of the members in a society. In that context, an individual's major motivation behind being moral is the tendency of being sociable. This tendency has great significance in a collective society.

Indian society is collectivistic and promotes social cohesion and interdependence (Chadda and Deb, 2013). There are differences from individualistic-oriented cultures associating more frequently rights-based features and collectivistic-oriented cultures more frequently associating duty-based attributes (Vauclair, Wilson and Fischer, 2014). Often members follow the rights and wrongs of their group considering it their duty. This can be supported by the view that co-present moral spheres always exist in an organically complex society as mentioned by Durkheim, cites Kenny (2015). It helps to maintain social harmony and avoid 'offended' feelings by other group members. It has been reported that many western women externalize certain norms of Muslim societies, such as wearing 'hijab' when they travel, to avoid offence (Brennan, 2013). Also research supports the idea that there is a psychological tendency for human beings to be motivated largely by social influence (Adler 1979). Similar research points out showing or commenting morally by an individual among his/her concerned group members makes the former feels that he/she is actually moral(Simpson and Harrell, 2013). This sociality forces one to worry about others while following or rejecting any norms. The thought which automatically comes to people's mind, is 'what would others think?' It is common among rural Indian community and this thought works as a standard for deciding 'ought's and 'ought not's' in relationships. Relationships and morality are related because the former clarify or determine the individual forms of the obligations we recognize. Every relationship engrosses certain obligations.

There are various possibilities of relationship between two people. The two levels of relationship which are taken into account in this article are personal and professional level between individuals and the society. The author does not discuss general relationship, for example relationship between two individuals travelling in the same bus or between a manufacturer and a customer. The term 'relationship' is taken to mean an involvement between two people based on love or caring or regular interactions which may be regulated by law or custom or mutual agreement and requires commitment (Clement, 2011) . Regarding morality in a professional relationship, the author mainly focuses on individuals working under an employer or group of employers. Here, issues related to two types of professionals are discussed: those who work as actors/actresses in films and teachers in higher educational institutes.

Social stratification and morality

A society where 'sociality' plays a significant role, defines morality in accordance with gender, religion, money, power, age, locality and profession etc. Also research shows that cultural heterogeneity has a significant influence on a person's actual behavior (Harding, 2007). Related to the societal systems, gender plays a significant part in deciding moral standards. For example, in a patriarchal society, moral obligations are specified for women more than men, such as, females who obey elders are considered as 'good.' It includes accepting the social norms like 'elders in the family decide a girl's

marriage.' In some cases 'girls are not allowed to talk or laugh loudly in front of the elders', 'wives are not allowed to call their husband by name', 'cooking is considered as the duty of women', 'husbands take the privilege of abusing their wives' and so on. Singh reports in The Times of India on November 02, 2014 that Indian women have hardly any say in decision making. In most cases the moral obligations of a female are fixed by other male members in her family or society and thus female members lose the right to choose for themselves the rights and wrongs. A research shows that the family roles of men and women have not changed much (Gere and Helwig, 2012). Morality and identity are interactive (Paniagua, 2014). Moreover, there is submission on the part of a woman to a man particularly with regard to rights over her sexuality (Jongwilaiwan and Thompson, 2011). The fear of losing this submission might be the reason for preferring the practice of a man marrying a woman who is younger than him, not elder to him and if any woman chooses the other way, society does not approve. Women follow these norms and do not dare to challenge, because they want to be part of the group, though the trend is gradually changing now. It is pointed out that unlike males who make rigid moral judgments, females often consider the interest and commitment to the good of others close to them (Zastrow and Kirst-Ashman, 2015). Instances of unethical control by elders in the family of a woman or a local panchayath group (which consists of members who are men) over the rights of women and girls are also part of ensuring and perpetuating this submission. It has been reported that a khap panchayat in Haryana (one of the states in India) banned cell phones for unmarried girls to prevent them from eloping with young boys (The Indian Express, 2010). Eloping with a boy is considered as trespassing on the special rights of parents and elders to decide a girl's groom. Often the authorities do not interfere in this unethical social control. The major assumption is that these issues must be solved by caste leaders or panchayat and it is not part of legal system of the state, states Patel (2008), citing Chowdhry (1997). This unethical control of women in terms of 'morality' hinders women's progress. It is pointed out that gender and cultural norms in a society affect the ability of women to participate actively in groups (Mudege et al, 2015).

Religion or caste also plays an important role in deciding moral standards. Studies show that religion and morality are related (Nwosu, 2006) and the former has an effect on personal norms (Traunmuller, 2011). People, who belong to religions that follow rigid principles, may strictly obey the attached moral rules and principles without checking the rationality behind their actions. Besides, morality varies according to the caste of a person. The moral standards for people belong to lower social strata are defined by the upper strata, for example, not allowing people who belong to a lower class/caste drink from the same wells, attend the same temple, wear shoes in the presence of upper caste or drink from the same cups in tea stalls etc. These social norms stem from the idea that people who belong to lower social strata are 'impure' or 'bad.' Darapuri reports on March 25, 2012 in The Hindu and another report in The Indian Express on September 04, 2013 that untouchability still exists in various parts of India. People do not question the irrationality behind these types of morality, which arise from the social norms. One who belongs to the lower strata simply follows these

because they fear the punishment of society or upper caste. Besides, an individual's blind faith does not allow him/her to support his/her belief with reason. For instance, there is a custom among a certain group of people, called 'made snana.' In that system, devotees (who belong to lower strata) roll over plantain leaves with leftovers of food had by Brahmins (upper caste). The major reason for doing this is the belief that they can be cleansed of their sins and only people who belong to the higher caste can clean the sins. The underlying assumption is that those who belong to the higher caste are 'pure.' Venkatesan reports on December 13, 2014 in The Hindu that the Supreme Court of India has banned the ritual saying that it is against morality. However, there are people, who really like to perform this ritual.

In contrast, in some localities minority groups are equally strong as the majority and the former like to maintain their own honour. Objecting to inter-caste/inter community marriage by both members from lower and higher strata is an exemplar for this. People think that by having inter-caste marriage they lose their honour in their society and so they commit honour killing to regain their honour. (Honour killing is the homicide of a member of a family or social group by other members, due to the belief of the perpetrators that the victim has brought dishonor or shame upon the family or community). Various reports show that it is still prevalent in modern India (The Hindu 2013; The Times of India 2013). Here, morality is defined in such a way that, to protect one group's (or family's) honour it is not wrong to kill the one who tried to dishonour the group (or family). Similarly, there is a difference between rich and the poor. If the rich deviate from the moral norms, the poor are reluctant to point it out and also the former does not mind at all. Citing Adam Smith (1976), Erappa (1996) points out that, in general ordinary people have stricter moral standards than the rich. These social strata play an important role in deciding 'morality' in both personal and professional relationships.

Explaining morality in personal relationships

Society often interferes in the setting up of individuals' moral standards, though a rational person is aware of the rights and wrongs of his/her actions. An individual is always conscious that he/she acts in social context (Stryker, 1980). Through the internal sanctions required for moral norms, the internal sanction is influenced by the membership in the society. The consciousness of being a member of a society plays an important role in deciding what ought to and what ought not be done by an individual. Generally, people seek a good 'social image' (may be unknowingly) in the community or in the group to which he/she belongs. 'Social image' is the views that others have of us and we take great care in presenting ourselves to others in ways that promote a positive impression (Mosquera, Uskul and Cross, 2011). To maintain the social image, it is required to behave in such a way which confirms the expectations of others. A study shows that when other group members expect an individual to act in a certain way that person's actual performance often conforms to those expectations (Kornblum, 2012). A person projects a certain character to the public or his/her society and obeying morality may be an effort to protect that same character. A society where morality is based on adaptability in the group praises such social image of a person by which one

never deviates from the societal norms. It is true that through their social interaction individuals construct moral judgments (Turiel 2002). Moreover, cultural expectations influence the moral behavior of people (Stets and Carter, 2012). Though the basic norms are absorbed as rational persons (for example caring for others), often people withdraw from wrong doings considering what others would think. Similarly they refuse to admit that certain action by other person is wrong if many do not consider it as wrong. For example, a group member does not consider child marriage as wrong or does not object openly to it, if the majority of his/her community members support it.

On the basis of sociality of morality, there are two types of personal relationships. The first is, (a) the relationship in which society does not question or talk about the morality involved, (because it is always considered to be moral), but specifies the moral obligations to be performed, and the second is, (b) that in which society sets moral standards in relationships. An example of the first type (a) is: parent(s)-child relationship. The moral obligation involved in this relation is care. The assumption is that parents, especially mothers, are of a caring nature. Society never doubts the morality involved in these relationships. However, the contradiction is that a relationship which is considered as moral becomes immoral because of the interference of cultural or religious rigidness of our society or the anti-social behavior of a person. In other words, there are mothers who sell their children for money and daughters for prostitution. Hume, Cohen and Sorvino (CNN, 2013), Warren (MAILONLINE, October 30, 2014) and the reports in news dailies (The Indian Express, November 27, 2014; The Times of India, September 9, 2014) confirm this fact. The father-daughter relationship is also not so decent because, there are fathers who harass their daughters physically or mentally. Related news is reported by Jha (The Times of India, Januray 14, 2014) and in India Today on May 19, 2014. In these cases, absence of moral obligations on the part of parent is the major reason for considering this relationship as indecent or immoral, though the latter is innocent. Here, human rights are not respected. There is a need to consider human rights as human freedom (Stevenson, 2014). Using violence (physical or mental or both) against children is taken as a special privilege by parents or elders. For instance, there are cultures (for example, UK (Blanchard 2015) and India (Borwankar 2015; Bhandary 2012)) where punishment such as smacking by parents is considered as not wrong if their children make any mistake or part of disciplining them. Even though the society keeps the moral norm that violence is wrong or 'one ought not to hurt others,' these kinds of violence are exempted in many cases. Society is reluctant to support the idea for the need to respect young ones by the elderly or the respect of juniors by the seniors or in an employment context respecting employees by the employer and so on.

In the second type of relationship, society specifies the standards in deciding an individual's ought and ought not's. For example: relationships between two unmarried males or females or between male and a female, society sets certain standards. For example, in India many people do not support homosexuality. It is illegal and considered as against moral law. Studies state that anti-homosexual societies with rigid gender roles believe that heterosexual relationships are the only appropriate ones (Ross,

1982). Another research shows that the narrative appeals with non-narrative appeals challenging ideas of homosexual relationship as inherently a religious issue are most likely to induce greater favourability toward homosexual relationship (Ghoshal, 2009) However, attitudes towards homosexuality are becoming slowly tolerant among women (Scott, 1998). Likewise, if a married young man/woman has a friendship with another unmarried woman/man, society decides the limit of closeness between the two. It does moral policing. It has been reported on February 14, 2015 in India Today, Gupta on February 3, 2015 in NDTV and in India News on May 14, 2015 that in certain societies unmarried males and females cannot assemble and cannot organize party or any function. A married woman should not have friends who are men and she is not allowed to go to a party or to the pub at night times. If any woman does so, people look at her as uncouth. It has been reported by Dutta on December 29, 2012 in The Hindu that people including a member of parliament (MP) questioned the morality of a rape victim who happened to be a married woman who visited a nightclub before the incident. Similar types of interference from society are seen in some professional relationships also.

Explaining morality in professional relationships

In certain professions 'sociality' influences the professionals. In professional relationships, the watchdog of morality is professional bodies or other agencies, not specifically the society. In a profession mainly three relationships exist – 'between employer and employee,' 'between two employees' and between 'employee(s)/ professionals and their clients.' In the employment context, employer can be a person, association, company or body. It is not necessarily an individual. The author discusses only the relationship between people. In an employment context, the company has the authority to determine the nature of relationship among its stakeholders. What ought to do and what ought not to do in the relationship is defined by one's company or employer. For example, sometimes the company policy states that dating among their employees is banned (e.g. Instagram). Dating is immoral according to the company. Regarding professional-client relationship, it is not necessary to have such relationship in all the professions. However, in certain professions, 'sociality' has a say. The two types of professional relationships which the society treats very differently are that of film actors/actresses and of teachers with regards to morality.

The 'oughts' and 'ought not's in these relationships are unusual. The society or viewers can be taken as a client(s) of the film field. (In this context a client(s) is defined as a person (or group of people) who uses the service of a professional person or persons). Actors and actresses enjoy certain special privileges and freedom regarding morality compared to others. For instance, society accepts with both hands the hugging or kissing between actors and actresses in the public place, but not between male or female politicians or between other professionals. The dress codes specified to other members in the society are not imposed on those who act in films. It has been reported by Bhagavati on October 03, 2014 in 'YOUTHKIAWAS' that 35% of the female characters are shown with some nudity and the members in the society enjoy it. A study points out of Indian films that 'characters in films judge women mostly on

physical and sexual terms, which in turn encourages the viewers to do the same in the real world' (Pal, 2014). Societal members adore the actors and actresses. Generally, society does not reject a film of an actor(s) for the reason that the actor(s) in the particular film did something immoral. For example, in an accident case a man was killed and four others were injured when an actor's car ran over the poor fellows who were asleep on a pavement. It was complained that while driving the actor was drunk. However, people still watch his movies and make them a success.

The profession in which society has a say is teaching profession. An interesting fact related to teaching profession in India is that not only employer has the authority to set ethical codes of conduct for teachers, but society also always keeps an eye on teachers' behavior and relationships. Teacher-student relationship is always treated as a sacred relationship. In India, even though teachers in higher educational institutes are not considered role models (like in lower education) by the students, romantic attraction between teacher and students, especially between female teachers and male students is not accepted by the society. The concept is that 'once a student, always a student or once a teacher, always a teacher.' However, romantic attraction between male teacher (mostly who is older) and a female student is accepted. There are male teacher- female student relations which ended up in successful marriages in India. Society considers the romantic relationship between an adult female teacher (who is older) and an adult male student is immoral. There is no logical reason for why the romantic relation between male teacher and female student is accepted but between female teacher and a male student is not accepted morally. Rationally, it matters only when the teacher has direct academic responsibility for the students, such as giving grade/mark to the student (Young, 1996). However, even though a male student leaves the institute after the completing his study, romantic attraction towards a female who was once his teacher is considered as immoral. That is to say, the standards, which are used to assess morality in personal relationship sometimes is used to assess relationship in one's professional life. The irony is despite the fact that in India teachers are considered as 'Gurus,' many cases of sexual harassment by male teachers in higher educational institutes have been reported (August 2014, The Hindu; October 2007, The Hindu; January, December 2013, The Hindu).

Conclusion

In brief, a society where 'sociality' plays a significant role in deciding morality, often shows a double standard in norms, on the basis of which the morality is assessed. Here, social norms are equated with moral norms. The result is defining morality on the basis of social stratifications. Moreover, even if a person has his or her own idea of rights and wrongs, the person acts on others' concept of rights and wrongs. It is influenced by the collective concept of do's and don'ts. If x believes that doing something is wrong, before proceeding further 'x' examines what others think about it. The collective opinion is given importance rather than individual opinion about the concept. This way the major definition of immorality for a person is 'anything which others think that I should not have done' is immoral. A person who is worried irrationally about what others will think, does not consider the consequences of his own actions,

how badly that affects others or whether the intention for doing certain action is justifiable or not. For social development, one needs the ability of inter-subjective engagement, which requires understanding the minds and intentions of others and then coordinating socially our behavior with others (Weisner, 2011). As human beings are moral agents, it is the duty of every one of us to respect each other whatever the relationship may be.

The problem with these types of thoughts is that this type of rigid morality affects the socio-economic growth and development of our society itself. It has been reported that India's economic rise coincides with moral change (Shafiq, 2015). All societies develop moral norms in favour of nonviolence, truthfulness, against killing, favouring love and harmony as a partial substitute for what would otherwise be hopelessly pervasive regulation aimed at getting people to behave in ways that may be of little or no direct benefit to them but nonetheless make everyone better off (Friedman 2006). However, tolerance (from all sides), social and economic mobility, fairness and democracy are vital aspects which should be embraced with the sociality of moral norms. A study points out that religion and ethical systems are the major source of social values in Asia and these social values have an effect on the growth of the economy concerned (Oshima, 1996). Economic growth relies upon moral impetus (Friedman, 2009). It is contradictory that a society which is famous for its democracy comprises people who follow moral norms, but interpreting them in an irrational way. A society where gender, class and caste discrimination exists cannot proceed with the pacing technology. Morality, which is completely based on sociality without rationality will certainly hamper growth and development. With the present changing trend in rigidity, we can hope that with time the rigidity in the concept of morality will decrease and be replaced by equality where morality is defined independent of caste, creed and gender.

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