

## **DECLINING HUMANISM AND MORALITY: GENERATIONAL AND SPATIAL DIMENSIONS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

We are living in a situation where the 'system world' colonises the 'life world'. Morality is merging in oblivion. The threads of group life have loosened, the bonds of community life have broken down and the hold of religion is fading away. Values and morality are waning fast. Did actually humanism decline? Does it pose a threat to social life? This paper analyses the parametric effect of generational and rural-urban differences on the perception of changes in values and declining humanism.

**Keywords:** Declining humanism, morality, changing values, material life, generations

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Indian society is built upon a number of noble values and morals. The age old traditions, rich religious scriptures, the teachings of great gurus etc. taught us noble values. With the recent socio-economic and technological changes, the decline of humanism and the erosion of morality and values became a phenomenon today. People show a craze for material possessions, power, status and pleasure. Competition, profit motive, individualism, parochial considerations etc. are the guiding principles of modern life. Violence, conflict, criminality, greed, terrorism, theft, addiction, goondaism, blackmailing, trafficking, harassment, bribery etc. have become the present norm. Charity, helpfulness, kindness, truthfulness, obedience, respect, loyalty, etc. have turned to be dictionary words.

What was immoral for our grandparents has become norm of the day, things that caused outrage a generation ago are celebrated now, and things once condemned are glorified now. The changes in economy, technology, family, education, polity etc. affect values. It is obvious that values will change along with the changes in technology and other material aspects of culture. The perceptions on changing values also vary with the changes in technology. Values and perceptions on value changes have spatial and temporal dimensions. The rural people are more concerned about the changes in values. They believe that the declining humanism and moral values will

lead society to an ultimate disorder; however such a belief is less among the urban people. While analysing the perceptions of generations, it can be seen that the elderly are more worried about the changes in values. They believe that the younger generations have lesser moral values. On the other side the younger generations see the changing values as a part of the larger social change and they believe that values and humanism are not declining, instead new humanism and new morality emerging.

### **1.1 Proposition**

The engagement of this study is to analyse the impact of differences in generations and residential areas on the perception of people on changing values and declining humanism. The proposition of the study is that “the elderly and the ruralites are more concerned about the value changes and declining humanism and they think it as a serious threat to the society”

### **1.2. Theoretical Framework**

Pitrim A. Sorokin considered that social change follow a cyclic pattern. He argued that civilization at any given time tends to be dominated by a specific *culture mentality*. Sorokin in *Social and Cultural Dynamics* (Sorokin, 1941) identified *Ideational*, *Sensate* and *Idealistic* as the three major culture mentalities. The *ideational* mentality concentrates on the spiritual world and stresses the importance of faith and virtue. The *sensate* mentality view reality as that which is perceived by the sense organs, and nothing more. The *idealistic* represents an equilibrium between the sensate and ideational. Sorokin believed that the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Western world was more *sensate*, where the dominant values were wealth, health, bodily comfort, sensual pleasures, power and fame. Analyzing on the basis of Sorokin’s typology, there is all the room to believe that the Indian society is in a sensate mentality, where the importance of values, morality and humanism is decreasing and people are competing each other for material benefits and worldly pleasures.

Ulrich Beck considers the change in the social structure occurred in the latter half of the twentieth century as "reflexive modernization" (Beck, 2002). According to him, risk society, globalization, and individualization are the most important aspects of reflexive modernity.

Individualization is a structural characteristic of highly differentiated societies. Beck proposed that individual behavior is becoming less bound by traditional norms and values. Instead, he argues that one's life is increasingly a reflexive or self-steered phenomenon.

Jurgen Habermas in his *Theory of Communicative Action*, (Habermas, 1984) discusses how the life world is colonized by the system world and how the value rationality is replaced by the instrumental rationality. By colonization of the life world, he means that the communicative patterns of the life-world are subjugated to alien standards of technical control. The life-world,

by-and-large, characterized by value-rationality begins to be eclipsed and absorbed in instrumental rationality, making persons become means to political and economic ends not in their interest, nor under their control. Value rationality is specifically tied to the life world and instrumental rationality to the state and economy. Colonization leads to the ever increasing intrusion of instrumental rationality and the emptying of value rationality for the social system. The result is that systemic mechanisms like money and power steer a social intercourse that has been largely disconnected from norms and values. In turn, people in this kind of modern social system come to value money and power, which are seen as the principal means of success and happiness. In other words, life world is colonized by the state and economy, and power and economy replace communication and consensus as the chief values of the life world.

Fukuyama (1999) points to the worldwide shift in values over the past four decades that he calls 'The Great Disruption'. He identifies the major reason for this shift as the transition from an industrial to an information age society. This has led to the rise of individualism and diminution of community. Indicators of this value shift are increased crime, diminished importance of family, kinship and social cohesion, and decreased trust in public institution.

Sun and Wang (2010), in their study in China concluded that the younger generation in China has shifted from traditional values to modern values. They regard self-development as the most important thing in life, than making contributions to the country and society. Further, the younger generations give importance to materialism and are more individualistic than the old generations and they are less likely to follow the traditional collective ideology.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

The objective of this study is to analyze the perceptions of people on declining humanism and its impact on society, and the differences in their perception on the basis of their generational affiliation and residential variations. The population for the study is the young and the old of Kerala. 200 samples were randomly selected for the purpose of the study, of which 100 from rural and 100 from urban areas. Half of the sample belongs to the young generation (aged below 35 years) and half to the old generation (aged above 60 years). Multi stage sampling was the method used for sample selection. One Panchayath ward and a corporation were selected from the study area (Kerala State). One ward each from the selected Panchayath and Corporation were selected in the second stage of sampling. The samples were selected randomly by using the voters list of the selected village wards and corporation wards as the sampling frame.

Generation	Rural	Urban	Total
Young- (Below 35 years)	50	50	100
Old (Above 60 years)	50	50	100
Total	100	100	200

An interview schedule was used to elicit primary data. Secondary data was collected from books, research papers and online materials.

### 3. DECLINING HUMANISM

The recent social changes have resulted in a decline in humanism and social values. People attribute highest importance to exchange value and give least importance to use value. This has serious implications upon social life. Without humanism and values no meaningful social life is possible. Industrialization, capitalism, technological advancement and the new social order created by globalisation and related developments have all contributed to the eroding of human values and placing material values as most important. We are living in a society where values like kindness, respect, charity, truthfulness, helpfulness etc have almost eroded and new values like competition, selfishness, possessiveness, profit motive etc. took their place.

The study enquired about the declining values and humanism by analyzing the perceptions of people belonging to the two generations. It is noted that only a meager portion (7.50%) of the respondents believe that there is no decline in values. However 60.5% believe that values are very much declining in modern society and 32% believe that values are declining to certain extent. Hence it is to be concluded that there is severe erosion of humanism and values.

**Table 1: Generation and Perception on Declining Humanism**

Generation	Very much declining	Declining to certain extent	Not Declining	Total
Old	77 (77%)	21(21%)	2 (1%)	100 (100%)
Young	44 (44%)	43 (43%)	13 (13%)	100 (100%)
Total	121 (60.50%)	64 (32%)	15 (7.50%)	200 (100%)

Chi Square= 24.63, df=2, Table Value 5.99,  $P \leq 0.05$

Table 1 shows that the older people very much believe that humanism is declining in modern times, than the young do. 77% of the old believe that humanism is declining very much, but only 44% of the youngsters do believe so. Remarkably, 13% of the younger generation does not believe at all that humanism is declining. This indicates that younger generation is less bothered about the decline in values and humanism while the elderly is much concerned about the decline. The test of independence applied confirms the relationship between the variables. Hence the

conclusion is that there is difference in the perception of the young and the old on the erosions taking place in humanism is certain. The old feels the decline more than the young does.

**Table 2: Place of residence and Perception on Declining Humanism**

Place of residence	Very much Declining	Declining to Certain extend	Not Declining	Total
Rural	83 (83%)	15 (15%)	2 (2%)	100 (100%)
Urban	38 (38%)	49 (49%)	13(13%)	100 (100%)
Total	121 (60.50%)	64 (32%)	15 (7.50%)	200 (100%)

Chi Square= 42.86, df=2, Table Value 5.99,  $P \leq 0.05$

Differences can be seen between the urban and rural people in their perception on declining humanism. Table 2 shows that, 83% of the rural people do believe that humanism is declining very much, on the other hand only 38% of the urban people have such a belief. Notably 13% of the urban people do not believe that humanism is declining. This may be because the rural people are more conditioned to the existing values. On the other hand the urban people are more adaptive to changing values. Chi square test also establishes the relation between place of residence and the perception.

**3.1. Declining Humanism: A Threat to Social Life.**

Declining humanism and values are generally considered as threats to meaningful social life. The study also enquired whether people believe that declining humanism is a threat to social life. It is seen that irrespective of generation and place of residence, majority believe that declining humanism is a threat to social life. However, differences are seen in the degree of their belief. Table 3 shows the perceptions of the people in this regard

**Table 3: Generation and the Perception that declining humanism is a threat to social life.**

Declining humanism is a threat to social life	Very much a threat	To a certain extend	Not a threat	Total
Old	75 (75%)	25(25%)	0 (0%)	100 (100%)
Young	44 (44%)	51(51%)	5 (5%)	100 (100%)
Total	119 (59.50%)	76 (38%)	5 (2.50%)	200(100%)

Chi Square= 21.97, df=2, Table Value 5.99,  $P \leq 0.05$

Further analysis in table 3 shows that the elderly see declining humanism as a serious threat to social life. 75% of them believe that it is very much a threat to social life and the remaining (25%) believe it is somewhat a threat to social life. Remarkably, it is observed that none of the elderly believe that it is not a threat. Among the youth, 44% have a perception that declining humanism is a grave threat to meaningful social life and 51% consider it as a threat to a certain extend. 5% of the youngsters believe that it is not at all a threat to social life.

**Table 4: Place of residence and the Perception that declining humanism is a threat to social life.**

Declining humanism is a threat to social life	Very much a threat	To a certain extend	Not a threat	Total
Rural	82 (82%)	17 (17%)	1 (1%)	100 (100%)
Urban	37 (37%)	59 (59%)	4(4%)	100 (100%)
Total	119 (59.5%)	76 (38%)	5 (2.5%)	200 (100%)

Chi Square= 42.03, df=2, Table Value 5.99,  $P \leq 0.05$

People’s perception on declining humanism as a threat to social life also varies with their place of residence. The rural people see declining humanism as a serious threat to social life than the urban people do. Table 4 shows 82% of the rural people see declining humanism as a serious threat to the social life, however only 37% of their urban counterparts do have such a perception.

### **3.2 Morality is Merging in Oblivion**

The decline in moral values is a global phenomenon. In the glamorous world of consumerism, the race for unlimited accumulation of material possessions is formidable. Ends alone matter most and means are free for all. The neglect of the means adopted inevitably leads to further fall in moral standards. Morals are the acceptable standard of general conduct or behaviour when judged by an average person or the society at large. The modern materialistic world raises our standard of living but declines our standard of life i.e. the value of life. People believe that morality is merging in oblivion today. However we can see rural urban and generational differences in the perceptions regarding declining morality. The study revealed that over half (50.5%) of the respondents believe that morality is very much declining. It is notable that only 5.5% of the respondents believe that morality is not declining.

**Table 5: Generation and Perception on Declining Morality**

Perception about morality \ Generation	Very much Declining	Declining to certain extent	Not Declining	Total
Young	32 (32%)	57 (57%)	11 (11%)	100 (100%)
Old	69 (69%)	31 (31%)	0 (0%)	100 (100%)
Total	101 (50.5%)	88 (44%)	11 (5.5%)	200 (100%)

Chi Square= 32.24, df=2, Table Value 5.99,  $P \leq 0.05$

Table 5 shows that the elderly are more concerned about declining morality. 69% of the elderly believe that morality is very much declining. On the other hand only 32% of the young have such a belief. It is pertinent to note that 11% of the young do not think that morality is declining.

**Table 6: Place of Residence and Perception on Declining Morality**

Perception on morality \ Place of residence	Very much Declining	Declining to certain extent	Not Declining	Total
Rural	75 (75%)	24 (24%)	1 (1%)	100 (100%)
Urban	26 (26%)	64 (64%)	10 (20%)	100 (100%)
Total	101 (50.5%)	88 (44%)	11 (5.5%)	200 (100%)

Chi Square= 49.32, df=2, Table Value 5.99,  $P \leq 0.05$

Table 6 shows marked difference between the rural and urban respondents on their perception on declining morality. It is seen that 75% of the rural respondents believe that morality is very much declining. However, only 26% of the urban have such a belief. There are 20% of the urban respondents who do not think that morality is declining.

It can be concluded that the elderly and the rural people are more concerned about declining morality. On the other hand the urban people and the young are not seriously concerned about declining morality. This is because the ruralites and elderly uphold highest level morality, and they see any deviation from the accepted moral standards as degenerating and disturbing. On the

other side, the young and the urban people think that new values and new morality is replacing the old ones.

### **3.3. Criminal Behaviour is Getting Societal Acceptance**

The above discussions show that there is a moral decay and decline in values taking place. The most important evidence of this situation is increasing crime – specifically crimes involving violence or those which involve citizens avoiding their basic duties and obligations to the state or to each other. The number of cases registered with the police is increasing year by year. The report of *National Crime Records Bureau* shows that the number of IPC crimes in the country has increased from 2851563 in 2014 to 2975711 in 2016. In Kerala, the number has increased from 206789 to 260097 during the corresponding period. It is worth serious thinking that criminal behaviour is not only increasing but it is getting acceptance in society. Many of the crimes which were considered serious in past have been considered petty now. Stealing, stabbing, blackmailing, trafficking, smuggling etc. are no news today. They are becoming part and parcel of day today events.

Moral decay and consequent crime had been the subject of sociological analysis by such philosophers as Emile Durkheim and Robert K. Merton. Durkheim described social systems of moral regulation as being in a critical or chronic state, near collapse, with severe consequences for individuals. Robert Merton argues that crime occurs when there is a gap between the cultural goals of a society (e.g. material wealth, status) and the structural means to achieve these (e.g. education, employment). This strain between means and goals results in frustration and resentment, and encourages some people to use illegitimate or illegal means to secure success.

The increasing number of crimes is not discussed in this paper. However, the study enquired whether the respondents believe that criminal behaviour is getting acceptance in society. Table 7 shows that majority (50.50%) of the respondents believe that criminal behaviour is getting acceptance in society. Only 3.50% believe the other way. Differences on the basis of place of residence and age is seen in this respect also. Tables 7 and 8 contains the matters.

**Table 7: Generation and Attitude towards criminal behaviour**

Criminality is getting acceptance Generation	Very much	Somewhat	No	Total
Young	39 (39%)	54 (54%)	7 (7%)	100 (100%)
Old	62 (62%)	38 (33%)	0 (0%)	100 (100%)
Total	101 (50.5%)	92 (46%)	7 (3.50%)	200 (100%)

Chi Square= 15.02, df=2, Table Value 5.99,  $P \leq 0.05$

Table 7 shows that most of the elderly (62%) do believe that criminality is getting very much acceptance in society and none of them has the view that it is not. In the case of the younger respondents the corresponding figures are 39 % and 7 % respectively. This indicates that the elderly are more concerned about the increasing criminality and glorification of criminal behaviour.

**Table 8: Place of Residence and Attitude towards criminal behaviour**

Criminality is getting acceptance Place of residence	Very much	Somewhat	No	Total
Rural	68 (68%)	30 (30%)	2 (2%)	100 (100%)
Urban	33 (33%)	62 (62%)	5 (5%)	100 (100%)
Total	101 (50.5%)	92 (46%)	7 (3.5%)	200 (100%)

Chi Square= 24.55, df=2, Table Value 5.99,  $P \leq 0.05$

Table 8 reveals rural urban differences in people’s attitude towards criminal behaviour. 68% of the rural respondents believe that criminal behaviour is getting glorified now. On the other side, only 33% of the urban respondents have that belief. Remarkably 5% of the urban respondents do not believe that criminality is being glorified.

The study also enquired about the reasons for increasing criminal behaviour. Majority (74.09%) believe that poor laws of the country are the main reason for increasing criminal behavior.

**Table 9: Generations and Perceptions on the Reasons for increasing criminal behaviour**

Reasons Generation	Poor laws	Poor social control	Craze for money	Changing values	Total
Young	68 (73.11%)	15 (16.12%)	5 (5.38%)	5 (5.38%)	93 (100%)
Old	75 (75%)	19 (19%)	3 (3%)	3 (3%)	100 (100%)
Total	143 (74.09)	34 (17.62%)	8 (4.15%)	8 (4.15%)	193 (100%)

Chi Square= 8.81 df=3, Table Value 7.81,  $P \leq 0.05$

Table 9 shows that the strength of the perceptions of the groups has some difference. 75% of the older generation feels the inefficiency of the operations of laws as the weightiest reason for the situation. The corresponding figure in the case of the younger generation is slightly below (73.11%). However, the second important reason varies considerably according to the two groups. Hence altogether, the test statistic gives confirmation regarding the relationship between the variables.

**Table 10: Place of Residence and Reasons for increasing criminal behaviour**

Reasons Place of Residence	Poor laws	Poor social control	Craze for money	Changing values	Total
Rural	76 (77.55%)	17 (17.34%)	2 (2.04%)	3 (3.06%)	98 (100%)
Urban	67 (70.53%)	17 (17.89%)	6 (6.32%)	5 (5.26%)	95 (100%)
Total	143 (74.09)	34 (17.62%)	8 (4.15%)	8 (4.15%)	193 (100%)

Chi Square= 4.35, df=4, Table Value 7.81,  $P > 0.05$

Table 10 shows place of residence of the respondents and the reasons for increasing criminal behaviour. No significant relation is established between the place of residence and the opinion about the reason for criminal behaviour. Irrespective of the place of residence, people consider poor laws as the most important reason for increasing criminal behaviour.

Besides poor laws, poor social control, craze for money and changing values are identified as the major reasons for increasing criminal behaviour. Three fourth of the people believe that the increasing criminality can be controlled only by strengthening the laws and implementing them in a strict manner. It was seen in many of the notorious cases in the recent past, the culprits were able to come out of the cases very easily and those who have been imprisoned were enjoying their imprisonment. This in turn give an impression to people that anyone can do any criminal act if s/he has economic and political backup.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

This paper analyses the perception of people on declining humanism and morality and their impact on society. The paper was based on a study conducted among the young and the old of Kerala, selected from both urban and rural areas. The study was based on the proposition that the perception of people on declining humanism and morality differs according to the place of residence and age. The analysis reveals that when taken together, majority of the respondents believe that humanism and morality is declining. But it is notable that there is marked difference between the young and the old in their perceptions. The elderly people very much believe that humanism and morality is declining and that this poses serious threat to society. However, the young are not that much pessimistic about the value changes. It is also revealed that the rural people believe that values and morality are declining very much and it has serious implications for society. However, the urban people do not think that these changes are very serious threat to society. Irrespective of generational and locational differences, people believe that criminal behaviour is increasing in the society and it has become the normal pattern. They identified poor laws as the major reason for increasing criminality.

It can be concluded that the rural people and the older generation are more concerned about value changes and they are worried about the consequences. However, the youngsters and urban people more tends to believe that these changes are natural and are leading to new social order with their normal consequences.

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