Mains Practice Questions

Q. We are at a time in our society when the grey area between right and wrong is increasing and individual decisions have never been more subjective. Comment. (150 words)

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Approach:

1. Establish link between Ethics as study of right and wrong behaviour and increasing ambiguity of right and wrong in present times.
2. State the reason for enlarging grey area and differences in individual decisions.
3. Conclusion.

Answer:

Introduction:

- Ethics is study of right and wrong behaviour. However, there has never been consensus as on what constitute right and wrong behaviour in certain or categorical terms. There has been always ambiguity what exactly constitutes right behaviour; this issue is reflected in position described in approach of '**Ethical Relativism'**.
- However, Ethical relativism is concerned with notion of wrongness and rightness in different societies or cultures. But, in present times due to various social, economic and political factors this phenomenon of increasing ambiguity of right and wrong is also working at Individual level. The individual morals and their differences are resulting in decisions becoming more and more subjective in contrast to a particular society's collective moral standards.

Body:

This grey area between right and wrong is increasing and individual decisions are becoming more subjective because of following reasons:

- **Modernization:** The process of modernization has unleashed wide ranging changes in technology, institutions, life styles, law education and brought in the process of rationalization. This process of rationalization and secularization has led to rational laws giving individual freedom in tussle with societal norms and ethics for e.g. homosexual relationships, women entry at Sabrimala and Haji Ali dargah etc.

- **Globalization**: The process of globalization has merged cultural distinction leading to 'glocalisation' , cultural appropriation etc. As cultures are not restricted to national boundaries, the ethical questions related to stereotyping, commodification of other cultures and relentless search for markets altering older social structures arise. Globalisation has also raised issues like free trade versus protecting markets and populations of developing countries, accepting refugees versus human rights etc. This process is causing changes in individual's morals codes they adopt moral standards from the cultures different from their own. This give rise to situations where within a society, with diverse populations, individuals have unique morals e.g. The beef ban raising the ethical grey areas, wherein a cultural norm/ ethics of a majoritarian community clashes with individual preferences of dietary habits.
- **Information Age:** In the present information age, the information has become a commodity that is quickly and widely disseminated, is easily accessible and can be manipulated, resulting in increased instances of hate mongering, impacting public opinions/ misuse of information by vested interests which calls for regulation versus the freedom of speech and right to be informed.
- **Technological Advancements:** The inventions and technological advancements are creating situations where technological use and its benefits is pitted against ethics, giving rise to subjectivity and ethical grey areas. For ex: gene editing helping fight the chromosomal diseases versus its misuse to create designer babies, or disrupting the gene pool for vested interests leading to concerns of biomedical ethics.

Conclusion

- Thus valid universal moral principles with in a society are facing challenges and different people and cultures increasingly have different values, beliefs and truths, each of which may be regarded as valid. The universality of ethical principles even within a culture itself is thus no more a valid proposition.
- Morality, then, is universal, in the sense that the structures and regulations necessary for regulating human behaviour for the sake of survival is found in all societies, but in practice morality is increasingly becoming relative to individuals and the social situations. ?