

IMMATERIALISM AND MINIMAL RELIGIOUSNESS IN IRAN

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Abstract: An International collective research made by Ronald Inglehart and his fellows in many industrial countries indicates that alongside an increase in the tendency of the majority of people towards “immaterialism” (Freedom of Speech, Quality of Life and their religiousness has found a minimal form: contentment with basic religious beliefs and self-centered spiritual experiences and the not so strong feeling of obligation to all forms of religious rites and rituals as recommended in Abraham’s religion. The purpose of this paper is to examine whether or not a relationship exists between the religiousness and tendencies of individuals to meta-ethics in the context of the Iranian Society, which is expected to encounter certain complexities. Results indicate that despite researches performed in other countries, in the Iranian society a very weak relationship exists between these two variables. Closer inspection of the materialism- immaterialism factor has indicated that due to the absence of ethical clarity, the mere evaluation of one’s level of tendencies towards either of the two poles of materialism-immaterialism does not result in useful results for analysis purposes.

Keywords: Immaterialism, Religiousness, traditional, experimental

I. INTRODUCTION

Experimental findings and theoretical analysis relating to them have indicated that religiousness in the current era has taken on a new form which is fundamentally different from religiousness in the traditional sense. Each person, instead of accepting the all inclusive instructions of the religion in all aspects of life and unconditional devotion to them, enters a self-constructed interaction with religious systems and form their own quasi religious systems. The common factor between these new forms is the devotion to religious beliefs and at the same time the lack of an absolute obligation towards religious rites and rituals. Studies have indicated that elements selected by new religious figures are usually the core elements of the traditional religious systems; these include elements such as belief

in God and life after death. In other words newly religious people tend to borrow a minimum religious belief from coherent systems and to define their religiousness around it.¹ Thus their religiousness can be called “minimal” as opposed to traditional or “maximalist” religiousness.

However results of national researches in nine countries across the world have shown that the new face of religiousness is oriented towards meta-ethics, freedom of thought, quality of life. (Inglehart, 1994: 210). In other words, the change in people’s religiousness is part of the more expansive conversion that has occurred in general measures in their ethical tendencies and among various elements a significant coherency exists.

But it can be predicted that in the religion of Islam and the Iranian society, the relationship between religious values and other values including meta-ethics would have a more complex relationship: on one hand religion has been intertwined in an inseparable way with the daily knowledge of members of the society such that it can be expected that aside from fundamental religious beliefs, some of the behaviors and religious rites are accepted by the majority (even immaterialists).

On the other hand, religious rules- similar to the formal orations of sovereignty – have a maximalist characteristic and in their extreme sense they have to cover most of the aspects of individual and social life. In other words the majority of traditional norms are the religious types and disobedience is in a way a defiance of religion or a change in one’s approach to it as a universality that affects all aspects of life.

It can be predicted that religious ethics as compared to other types of ethics undergo a more difficult process of change. In other words, meta-ethical ap-

¹ It should be noted that for purposes of this research, the newly introduced propensities which are known as cults or quasi-religions and do not relate in any clear way with ancient religions, have been excluded.

proaches may not always be adopted along with minimalist religiousness.

Thus considering, the objective of this paper is to study the relationship of immaterialism with people's religiousness and to attempt to explain the possible complexities inherent in such a relationship. Such that firstly, the form and type of religiousness of individuals and subsequently its relationship with the tendency of the person towards materialistic values or meta-ethics, are evaluated.

Data used in this research are part of the data gathered in the "Social Values" project carried out in Iran, which has done by the main author of the paper (Taghi Azadarmaki, Social Science Faculty, the University of Tehran) and itself been part of the plan for the Social Values Global project which Inglehart has run. Current data are part of the responses made by 2275 respondents across Iran.

II. LITERATURE AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Minimalist Religiousness

Today, at the global level, we are facing a cultural circumstance that retains its general characteristics even if it is theorized according to various types of concepts-post modernism, post industrialism, deferred capitalism, flexible capitalism.

"The hypothetical treatment of questioning..., the maximalist nature, strong suspicion of ancient and traditional beliefs and the denial of expectations for the achievement of ultimate solutions and complete and absolute responses" (Ahmad 2001: 37); enthusiastic praise of "Our weakness in experiencing the reality is a systematic and coherent integrity" (Leytar, 2005); destroying the "existence (meaning)", effects and appearance of causes as a resource" (Calinicus 2003: 44); the appearance of "A culture lacking depth and unable to bond with history" in which "neither real spirituality nor real faith or certainty have a place" (Jameson,1998); the individualism of values and the ever increasing maximalist orientation (Riis 1993:378).

In such a situation among all humanistic- social phenomena, religiousness may have the most complex situation: faith in an absolute rule as a complete truth, the adjustment of all actions and behavior based on it and obedience of an ultimate being, maximalist orientation and ambiguity would seem impossible. However, since traditional religiousness still exists in these circumstances- although much weaker- a new image of relationship with ancient religions has been formed due to the present situation, where in the religious person borrows minimum characteristics of ancient or traditional elements and subsequently

adorns them and adjusts them to individual conditions and structures of the era.

Religiousness, in empirical sociology researches is generally the minimal devotion to aspects that have been employed in models that are used for studying religiousness in social studies. In one of the most applicable models (the Glac and Stark model) religiousness aspects have been defined as: the aspect of belief (fundamental beliefs that are expected from followers of a certain religion), the aspect of rites (religious rites performed individually or socially), the experimental aspect (religious aspect; emotions relating to connecting with the supreme being), conceptual or religious knowledge aspect (information gained by one about religious principles and beliefs, the history of the religion and his holy book), the and finally the consequential aspect (whatever the religious person has to abide to in his individual and social life) (Serajzadeh and Tavakolli, 2001: 164). According to this model, minimal religiousness refers to the summarization of religiousness into two dimensions namely faith and experiment and the reduction of one's devotion to the other two dimensions (religious knowledge and the observance of external religious symbols in individual and social life).

Intellectuals in theology and sociology fields have offered various definitions and names for minimal religiousness.

Hunt (2005: 30) has illustrated the position of religion as such: the cadence of modern and pre-modern narrations may cause post modern circumstances to result in the cadence of some of the religious aspects, this may have a stronger consequence than all those who have claimed the "Monopoly of truth" and need the support and devotion of the population and socio-political institutions". On the other hand, the purging of spirituality from rationality, questions the modernization of secularity and thus with the decadence of the validity of rationality, religion may once again fill the gap for the rich meaning of life. However, in the modern era, the abandonment of traditional religions results in the formation of new forms or even quasi-religions to respond to the need (same source). In such religions, instead of a coherent system of beliefs and rituals, a spiritual and mysterious experience of an individual with a central role is adopted (same source: 31).

Ole Reese believes that in the present era "religion changes from a social requirement to a personal choice"; "Bricolage" or "personal efforts towards the composition of various ideologies into one meaningful existence", has been used as a guideline for offering a personal definition of religion and giving it an applicable meaning; and in the present context of

maximalist “religious bodies compete with each other in a consumer market [to attracting customers]” (Reese 1993: 376).

III. AN APPROACH TO THEORETICAL AND EMPIRICAL LITERATURE ON NEW FORMS OF RELIGIOUSNESS IN IRAN

Various aspects of minimal religiousness have been theorized by religious intellectuals in Iran. For example, in the religious intellectual by Abdolkarim So-roosh, an ideal concept of religion is one which is “minimal”; a concept which treats religion as a resource that provided the minimum requirements and not an “adequate maximum” in people’s lives.

Accordingly, he believes that the minimum requirement that can only be provided by religion (or the religious core) is the determination of the ultimate meaning of life and the status of humans in the universe, provision of the possibility of a personal intuitive experience- in every person’s individual way- and its interpretation, and in general the flourishing of one’s life after death.

However, it should be noted that as much as the dependence on rationality and human knowledge and the approach on general ethical values is adequate for the management and programming of worldly issues (Democratic authority is a symbol of this adequacy), it does not lead to divine happiness. The oblivion of minimal religiousness leads to discontentment of the person with his/her status in this world and consequently the desire to possess and even feel the “obsession with divinity”.

Various researches that have been performed in different national levels have indicated that opinions on minimal religiousness are more or less valid in Iran. The devotion to religious beliefs is a factor that determines one’s religiousness. It even exists among the youth, where expectations are for the deepest changes in religiousness. However, other aspects of religiousness, especially the devotion to religious activities and rituals observes a significant slump in religious faith; a reduction which intensifies and covers the mandatory rituals as well as optional rites. In the summary of results a few of these researches have been presented.

The results of national researches and approaches of the youth in Iran in the year 2004 (The National Youth Organization 2005 A) has indicated that youth respondents believe themselves to be religious. 88.4 percent have considered themselves very or quite religious. 84.4 have considered the devotion to religious beliefs as a very significant factor. 87.3 percent are proud to be Muslims. Analyzers of this report emphasize that the “issue of their definition and how

they consider themselves to be religious people” is a different subject that has not been covered in this research. The “gap between the mind and vision, approach and behavior [...] is quite significant in religious rituals. For instance, even though the majority of respondents- 86.2 percent- have claimed that no other form of worship can replace the prayer “namaz” but only 65.1 percent have considered themselves devoted”. In general “when one moves from a level of belief to a level of behavior and action, the level of devotion is reduced”. A small percentage of the youth feel obligated to attend mosques.

Religiousness among the youth “does not have a specific and accurate meaning” and has a “relatively broad spectrum”. “Even though their devotion to religious beliefs is quite significant, their view of religion and ethics is quite personal.” Some of these individuals, who do not feel obligated to say their “namaz”, consider themselves quite religious. Approximately half of these youth believe that servicing their fellow countrymen could be considered some sort of worship. “The examination of changes in the national culture pathology has indicated similar results (National Youth Organization 2005B). In this research, to examine the changes in religiousness as one of the cultural-ethical issues, seven national researches were performed in the religious action aspect and indicated that tendencies towards the prayer “namaz” have become less; the changes are not quite significant yet cannot be ignored (p 64). The tendency to participate in group “namaz” may have had oscillation throughout recent years yet the general pattern indicates a reduction (pp 65, 69).

However, the significance of religion in people’s lives has not changed significantly and has had high intensity throughout all these years. Dependence on religion for resolving problems has followed an increasing pattern (p97).

The post analytical results of 15 researches performed in Tehran, throughout the last decade² has shown that religion is still a determining factor in the lives of the youth in the city of Tehran: an overwhelming majority of the youth (82.13 percent) depend on religion to be able to give meaning to their lives. They believe that problems are solved easier when depending on religion and even adopt a worldview which makes them accept death easier through a religious faith towards the other world.

² Maryam Alamzadeh. “The Study of Capacities and Limitations of Religious Discussion, in Understanding and Determining New Forms of Religiousness among the Youth”, M.A. Thesis, College of Social Studies, University of Allame Tabatabayi.

Moreover, despite what the ever increasing rationality of the system of beliefs suggest 70.6 percent of the Tehran youth population believe in destiny. The strong belief in destiny and pre-ordained future of a person indicates the same. The other issue that indicates religion's strong status within the lives of Tehrani youth, is their strong belief in the other world and the obligation to be accountable for one's worldly actions. Moreover, the majority of youth believe in life after death, the apocalypse and punishment and rewards for one's actions.

What should now be considered is whether or not a new blend of beliefs and religious rituals can be evaluated as a dependent variable in relation to materialism/immaterialism?

Considering the critical situation of religion in the Iranian society and data that reflect the strong devotion of people (regardless of their ethical orientation) to religious beliefs, it seems that the materialist-immaterialist relationship with traditional religiousness is not quite clear and distinct and that other forms of religiousness and other variables relating to Iran should be engaged for these purposes.

IV. MINIMAL RELIGIOUSNESS AND META-ETHICS

The conceptual framework use for studying the issue of religiousness and its proportion to other ethical orientations is a framework that has been approved in empirical studies performed by Inglehart in 15 countries across the world (11 European countries plus the United States, Canada, Japan, Mexico and South Africa).

Inglehart (1994), has analyzed the differences that exist between newer forms of religiousness and the traditional religion as difference between materialist and immaterialist groups and attempts to analyze them based on every person's subjective orientation. Inglehart has used results from national researches in various countries to prove the hypothesis that experience economic wealth and social security throughout their socialization process, value such factors as the quality of life and freedom of thought more than they do financial and life-related factors. He calls these people the immaterialists and believes that their number is rising. He then calls the opposite group as materialists and attempts to examine their differences in various contexts including religion.

When it comes to religion, Inglehart believes that alongside an increase in meta-ethical values, religious and some other traditional norms are diminishing, especially among the youth. He names three major causes for this cadence: the reinforcement of the feeling of security that adjusts absolute values, the

degeneration of the applicable aspect of traditional norms and the need felt by people to unify their ideology with everyday life experiences (1994: 201-204).

He examined data collected from researches in 15 countries and reached the general conclusion that the ratio of immaterialists to those devotion to traditional religions is weaker than the same ratio for materialists. However immaterialists have a greater tendency towards uniformity in the concept of the meaning of life and despite the not so deep devotion to the teaching of ancient religions, they are inclined towards fundamental beliefs including the existence of God.

In fact, Inglehart believes that the cadence of traditional religions alongside immaterialism does not necessarily mean anti-religiousness. Immaterialists are still struggling with the meaning of life- which is the core problem of traditional religions- and have provided some definition through the unity of life with the supreme being-God. However, for social norms governing everyday life, the devotion to traditional values among immaterialists is diminishing.

With regards to the literature, the Inglehart theory on religion, which we are looking to test in this article, is that with the popularity of meta-ethics, religion has lost its ancient applicable-ritualistic meaning and degraded into a collection of religious beliefs and experiences (minimalistic religiousness).

V. METHODOLOGY CONSIDERATIONS

To examine the relationship between meta-ethics and the form of religiousness of respondents, an index has been established for each of the two variables. Subsequently the correlation of the two variables has been examined using the r-Person coefficient. The method of formulating the indices has been shown below:

Materialist-Immaterialist Evaluation

To establish an index for measuring materialistic-immaterialist orientation of the respondents, responses to 12 of the factors offered by Inglehart for testing the orientation were examined. The respondents were requested to chose their first and second priorities from among three groups of four values (each group includes two materialistic and two immaterialist options); thus each respondent makes six choices. The materialist-immaterialist index was then established: if the index has been chosen for each of the six materialistic values, it would have a value of 6 and incase none are materialistic (all are immaterialist), then a value of zero has been considered. Thus a range of seven values is created in which the number

6 would be reflective of absolute materialism while 0 would be absolute immaterialism.

Testing Religiousness

To test the religiousness of materialists and immaterialists, criteria related to religiousness were divided into two major categories: criteria related to fundamental beliefs and common religious norms (including belief in God, Heaven and hell or saying one's daily prayers) and criteria reflective of one's ritualistic devotion to traditional religion (including regular attendance in the mosque for saying one's prayers).

The verifiability of these two criteria indicate the intrinsic compatibility of the two indices (in the first index, Alpha= 0.7795 and in the second, Alpha = 0.7904). Upon uniformity of the codes related to each category through repetitive coding, the index would be reflected as the total of all composite codes. Thus codes accepted by the first index would compose a range from 0 to 13 and be named minimalist reli-

giousness while the second index called traditional or maximalist religiousness would cover a range from 0 to 18.

VI. FINDINGS ON IMMATERIALISM, MINIMALIST AND TRADITIONAL RELIGIOUSNESS

The Tendency Towards Material-Immaterial Values

The tendency of respondents to materialist and immaterialist values was evaluated using the index introduced in methodology. Table 1 reflects the normal distribution of respondents at seven points throughout the index.

Religious Type of Respondents

Table 2 illustrates the responses received based on the minimalist religiousness range (devotion to basic religious beliefs). As can be observed the majority of respondents (65 percent) have had the highest scores (11 and 12) within the range.

Table 1: Normal Distribution of Respondents on the Materialism-Immaterialism Range

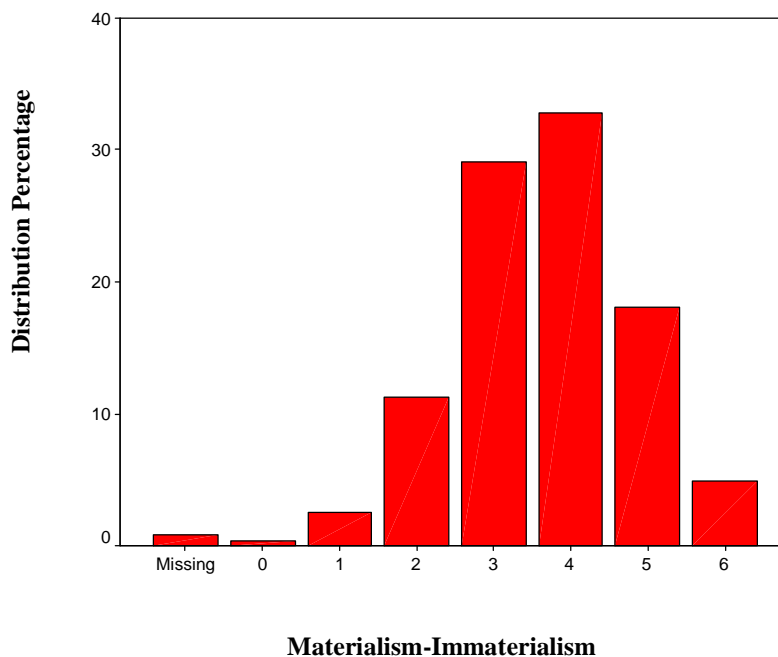
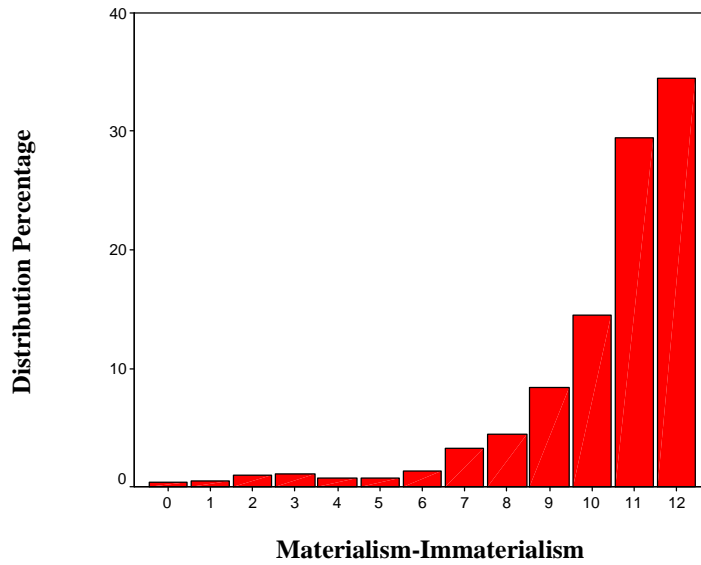


Table 2: Normal Distribution of Respondents on Minimalist Religiosity



It should be noted that a high score in this range does not necessarily reflect religious minimalism of the respondent, but rather that the individual is devoted to minimum religious requirements. He/she may even be deeply devoted to religious rites and rituals.

Table 3 indicates the distribution of respondents on the traditional religious range. As can be observed from the table and the average score of individuals (11.91), the majority have a higher average level of devotion to daily religious rituals and rites.

Ratio of Materialism-Immaterialism to Religiosity

The ratio of one’s materialism-immaterialism to each person’s score as indicated by indices for two types of religiosity has been calculated using regression and Pearson’s coefficient. In religious minimalism, results indicate that a low correlation exists between two variables (Pearson’s correlation coefficient = 0.113, sig = 0.01). The direction of the relationship has been shown in Table 4.

Table 3: Normal Distribution of Respondents on the Traditional Religiosity Range

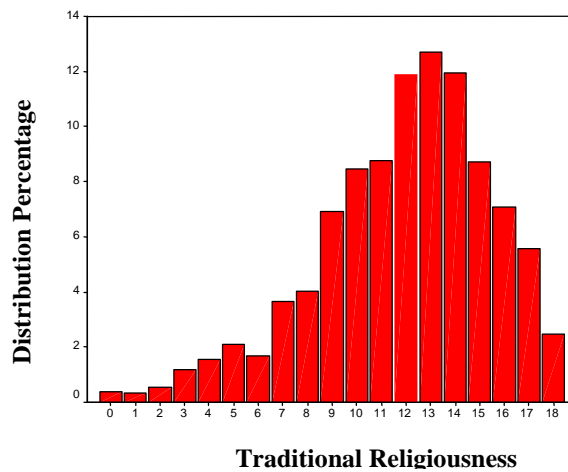
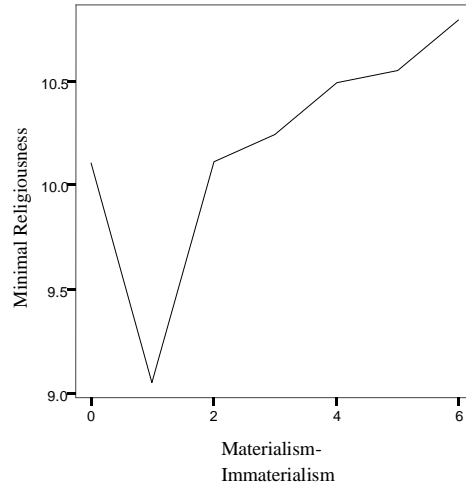


Table 4: Materialism-Immaterialism Regression (Horizontal) and Minimal Religiousness (Vertical)

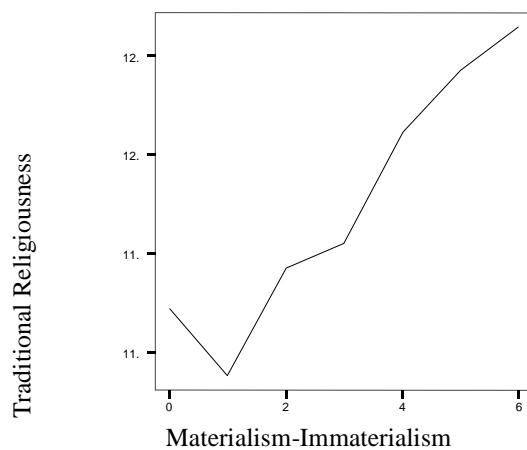


A low correlation exists in the relationship between materialism-Immaterialism and traditional religiousness (Pearson's correlation coefficient = 0.118, sig = 0.01) and the direction of the relationship can also be seen in table 5.

Two points are immediately induced from the results. First, the correlation between materialism-immaterialism with religiousness (whether minimalist or maximalist) is weaker than predicted by Inglehart's global project. Second, the module for this correlation does not differ much in both types of reli-

giousness; even though it was expected that a stronger similarity would exist between immaterialists and materialists in minimalist religiousness. The regression line shows a lower slope in table 2 while in maximalist religiousness (traditional) the difference between these two categories is more evident. However the difference is obvious in both tables, meaning that immaterialists show less interest even in the most basic and fundamental beliefs and levels of devotion to religious ordinances as compared to the materialists

Table 5: Materialism-Immaterialism Regression and Traditional Religiousness



To complete the process of examining the relationship between religiousness of respondents with materialism-immaterialism, another hypothesis can be tested; that being such that the legitimacy and validity of traditional norms (generally religion-dependent) are less valued by immaterialists; these include norms such as unconditional respect towards parents, the necessity of nurturing religious children and emphasis on the traditional role of women.

Following the relationship between some of these variables with the materialist-immaterialist index has been examined.

A close look at the distribution of advocates and adversaries of the necessity and legality of female employment across the materialist-immaterialist range reflects that the distribution of proponents and adversaries is almost uniform throughout the seven score range (about 60 percent of individuals with each score are advocates and the rest are adversaries) the low amount of correlation coefficient is also indicative of the absence of a significant relationship between the two variables (equal to 0.055). The same pattern is observed in the other tables as well. The ethical orientation of the respondents holds a weak correlative relationship with their opinions on the religious upbringing of children and marriage as a valid traditional institution. The calculated d-summers for the relationship between the traditional upbringing of children and immaterialism-materialism is equal to 0.054 and for the relationship between view on marriage as a traditional institution and materialism-immaterialism of the respondents equal to 0.096.

The four points presented above are the only ones in which a meaningful relationship exists between one of the 14 traditional norms extracted from the questionnaire with the materialism-immaterialism index. However it can be observed that the correlation is at its best a very weak correlation (the highest value for d-summers = 0.096). This would mean that the relationship between materialism-immaterialism of individuals (using the index introduced here) and their devotion to traditional norms does not follow a definite module.

A Closer Look to the Evaluation of Materialism-Immaterialism

Prior to any analysis on the unexpected results, the possible imperfections of the methodology have to be considered. The most significant drawback that may have distanced the results away from reality is the over trusting of the 12 criteria index of Inglehart for the evaluation of materialism-immaterialism in the

Iranian Society. Even though it may be possible that the validity of the index has been proven in other countries, yet the case may be different in the Iranian society. The most significant reason may be that some of the meta-ethics (for instance, progress towards a more humanistic society) are compatible with traditional religious values. (Inglehart has encountered the same when analyzing Japan's data and emphasizes that the tendency towards these types of values is not a consequence of immaterialism but rather it is due to "pre-materialism"). thus respondents cannot be easily placed within a range with two extremes; one materialism and the other immaterialism and the mere examination of these two poles requires a 12 criterion factor.

The factor analysis of the 12 criteria used for the evaluation of the value orientation of respondents reflects results requiring some deliberation. A total of eight factors are extracted from the analysis of 12 criteria, which does not add meaning to our analysis; since they only change a small percentage of the total variance (between 8 to 15 percent) in the first place

In the second place, each criterion shows a significant correlation with more than one factor; for instance the criterion "significance of opinions" has a more or less similar correlation with four criteria namely 1,4,5,7 (values are 0.35, 0.57, 0.49, 0.43 respectively).

Most importantly, because of these reasons, factors extracted as mentioned above, do not hold analytical meaning. For instance materialistic values have a greater correlation with both factors 1 and 2, which are not quite different in the meaning that they hold. Factor number 3 reflects a very non-uniform correlation between the criteria and the factors and only one criterion (social participation) indicates strong correlation and in factor 6 the two criteria that reflect a high correlation (cities with urban design and social discipline) are representative of two different groups of values and does not provide us with the possibility of naming the factors as materialistic and immaterialist.

The reciprocal correlation table of 12 factors indicates that none of the two factors which have a positive correlation with each other can be combined with a meaningful factor.

Even implementation of limits on data to include only those with similar revenues, social class or residing in a specific area (for instance central Tehran) do not significantly affect results from factor analysis and meaningful and analytical factors can still not be derived.

VII. CONCLUSION

1. Lack of Ethical Clarity

Results obtained from the analysis of the 12 factors in different circumstances assists us in understanding the distribution of respondents in the materialist- immaterialist range. The establishment of two contradictory ethical types, namely materialist and immaterialist is hardly possible due to value preferences of Iranian respondents, thus if the two types are assumed as existing and a range established based upon it then the majority of respondents shall be categorized in combination categories mostly in the average range.

In other words, the Iranian society has distanced itself from the ethical clarity that is a result of the formation of two materialists and immaterialist poles. Members of the society, especially the average class population which are mostly affected by changes in values, live in an ambiguous conceptual atmosphere which is the result of clashes between multiple ethical systems and identical circumstances of their daily life together. On one hand the ethical system of the government provides a combination of religious and civil laws in a collection of procedures through the education system and formal media. On the other, the ethical system dictated by the family does not necessarily conform to the former and these result in the formation of a new set of values in the person. Moreover the individual becomes subject to liberal values which have been introduced to the society through global communication.

But it is the identical and all-inclusive circumstances of people's lives which determine the selected combination of values from the clash of systems. If analysis is limited to only the average class of Iranians, it should be noted that those that fall in this class have not, contrary to Inglehart's theory, experienced a high level of economic stability and social security, and it could be predicted that materialistic values have always had a significant value in ethical choices of this class. On the other hand, due to their increased contact with liberal values, they have, more than any other social class, the readiness to regard immaterialist values globally valid. This has resulted in a low correlation between various choices of individuals, of materialist and immaterialist values. The "Chaos of Values" becomes more highlighted in other social classes, because the majority of society considers themselves part of the middle class even though their economic and cultural capital and properties are not in any way similar to the middle class. These individuals borrow the combination module of the middle class and combine it even more with the different circumstances of their lives.

2. The Penetration of Religion in Conceptual Values and Lifestyles

Thus the evaluation of religious beliefs and behavior with value orientations of individuals is quite a difficult task since value orientation cannot be considered a clear and definable issue in the first place.

However in the evaluation of the ratio of religiousness with materialism-immaterialism, another issue has to be considered and that being the impact of religious values on individual ethical choices; such that religion creates disorder in the dual categorization of materialism-immaterialism. In Inglehart's conceptual theory, religiousness (in the form of total obedience of one of the forms of traditional religion) is considered a traditional phenomenon and would thus be contradictory with immaterial values. (Abandonment of religiousness and inclinations towards immaterial values has both been considered a result of economic, life and informative security). However some of the immaterial values introduced in the present study- such as the inclination towards a more humanistic and non-individualistic society have a religious ring to it and they can dispense those individuals who consider themselves immaterialists- and thus non-religious- from selecting them. On the other hand, certain material values hold a non-religious ring for the fundamentalists and this can even direct them towards immaterial values as compared to the material ones.

Thus the analysis of value chaos becomes even more complex with the interference of religious values. Traditional-religious norms cannot be considered quite helpful in the analysis process, neither due to their dual nature caused by the ambiguity of each individual's ethical values. For instance, the issue of marriage is bound so tightly with social norms and beliefs that even the immaterialist cannot free him/herself from obligations induced by this bond and to deny the significance and validity of Family and Marriage.

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