

TOWARDS ERADICATING SOCIAL VICES IN NIGERIA: REFLECTIONS FROM ZAKARIYYA'S *Faḍā'il-Aḥmāl*

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Abstract

Eradication of social vices has been the watchword of every religion, including the government in order to have a peaceful environment that is habitable for every citizen. However, despite all the measures taken by the concerned people of Nigeria, many still remain paperwork. Thus, there is a need for another approach towards eradicating social vices. Therefore, this paper aims at utilising the religious cum spiritual approach of Zakariyya's *Faḍā'il-Aḥmāl* to suggest solutions to the problem of some social vices in Nigeria through inferences and reflections. The methodology employed is analytical. The study revealed that the implementation of the reflections inferred from the religio-spiritual discussion of Zakariyya will enhance the eradication of social vices to the barest minimum. The paper concluded that despite the book being solely compiled as a book of virtues, it equally *pari passu* takes care of various facets of life and is, therefore, capable of eradicating social vices if implemented.

Introduction

It is an indisputable fact that Nigerian society has transformed into a non-humanitarian society and, because of that, becoming un-habitable for its people to live due to the daily widespread of various social vices. Today, social vices have reached the peak of its pinnacle. Despite several concerted efforts exerted by the authorities in Nigeria to fight the situation, it remains a great challenge to the harmony of the citizens and, by extension, affecting negatively the social sustainability of the country at large. However, little could be said to have been achieved through the concerted efforts of the concerned authorities.¹ According to Arimiyah, the well-being of the society depends on high societal values or how morally upright and disciplined the citizens of the society are.²

Issues of eradicating social vices are part of inferred reflections in Zakariyya's *Faḍā'il-Aḥmāl*. The author utilises the commentary of some *Aḥādīth* (prophetic statements) to point out the negative impacts of some social vices vis-à-vis fraud, smoking, drug addiction, hoodlums and sexual activities. In order to proffer a way out to eradicating social vices in Nigeria, this paper aims at providing a solution from the religious cum spiritual discussion of Zakariyya's *Faḍā'il-Aḥmāl*.

Faḍā'il-lu'l-Aḥmāl is considered one of the most dignified books of Zakariyyā al-Kandahlawī and one of his famous works on *Ḥādīth*. Basically, the book is a combination of various *Aḥādīth* on different topics such as

stories of the Prophet's Companions, virtues of the Glorious Qur'an, virtues of observance of prayer, virtues of remembrance of Allah, virtues of preaching, and virtues of fasting.³ The name of the author is Muḥammad Zakariyyā bin Muḥammad Yaḥyā bin Muḥammad Ismaʿīl, who originated from *Kandhlah* in the year 1898 C.E.,⁴ grew up in *Gangoh* and *Saharanpur*⁵ and died in the year 1982 after a brief illness in *al-Madinatu'l-Munawwarah*.⁶

Conceptual Meaning of Social Vices

Social vices are bad traits, unhealthy and negative behaviours that are against the morality of society and frowned upon by members of the society.⁷ Vice is a Latin word '*vitium*' meaning defect or failing. It is defined as a bad habit or immoral activities.⁸ Social vices are the act in which immoralities take ground in society.⁹ There are various causes of social vices. These include peer pressure, broken homes, lack of religious understanding and a host of others.¹⁰

Zakariyya, through a religious perspective, also tends to the importance of having a society free of vices in his book, *Faḍā'il-A'māl*. He explains while quoting Ahmad Ad-Dahlawī that:

To save the people from the fatal effects that their own customs and rituals can bring them, there is nothing more useful than to make one of the religious services so common a custom and so public a ritual that it may be performed openly before everybody by any person, whether he be learned or illiterate. The town-folk and the countrymen should both be equally anxious to observe it. It should become a subject of rivalry and pride among all of them, and it should be so universally practised that it becomes part and parcel of their social set-up, so much so, that life without it may be worthless for them.¹¹

In another place, he stresses the importance of religion in eradicating social evils in the society. He describes that while mentioning some of the three essentials of observing *Ṣalāt* (prayer) vis-à-vis sincerity, fear of Allah and His remembrance. He said:

Prayer (*Ṣalāt*) is not a prayer (*Ṣalāt*) if these three are missing. Sincerity heralds' virtuous deeds, fear of Allah expels vices, and His remembrance is the Qur'an, which in itself is a guidance towards good and guard against evil.¹²

In furtherance, Zakariyya explains that one of the root causes of vices is the devil. This devil, as mentioned by Zakariyya, may be likened to peer pressure and environment, as established by sociologists. He quoted while quoting al-Ghazālī, who was also reporting from Ḥasan Al-Baṣrī that:

The devil (*Shayṭān*) says: I presented sinful deeds in an attractive form to the Muslims, but they nullified my efforts through forgiveness (*Istighfār*). Then I presented before them vices in the garb of virtues, thus leaving no initiative for forgiveness (*Istighfār*).¹³

Thus, Zakariyya pays more attention to eradicating social vices in society through his *Faḍā'il-A'māl*. He addresses it by speaking from the grassroots or sources of vices. In his explanation, it is inferred that every individual is a product of his environment and that environment is an end-product of each family. While checking the social vices from the parents' side, he explains in his commentary that:

We should not spare the rod in checking the children from becoming reckless in doing anything they like. Sometimes, it is necessary to use the rod. It is a pity that out of love, we do not use the rod in the beginning, and, when the children get spoiled, we cry and complain about them. To spare the rod and to spoil the child is no kindness at all. Who would like to save a child from a surgical operation under advice from a doctor for the simple reason that it would cause pain to him?¹⁴

From the above, it can be concluded that the causes of social vices need to be addressed as part of the ways to eradicate social vices in society. Hence, Zakariyya presents that for social vices to be eradicated in a nation, there is a need to address the major causes and sources. Among the reflections inferred from the religious cum spiritual discussion of Zakariyya's *Faḍā'il-Aḥmāl* towards eradicating social vices are discussed subsequently. For the sake of brevity, three of these social vices in Nigerian society are examined with reflections from Zakariyya's commentary.

Smoking

Smoking is the act of inhaling and exhaling the fumes of burning plant material. A variety of plant materials are smoked, including marijuana and hashish.¹⁵ Smoking is a long practiced act by American Indians.¹⁶ It later spread to other areas and today is widely practised around the world, including Nigeria, despite medical, social, and religious arguments against it.¹⁷ Smoking is a social vice because its harmful effects are not limited to smokers. This is because the toxic components are also found in the secondhand smoke, that is, the smoke exhaled by the smoker (mainstream smoke) and the smoke that rises directly from the smouldering tobacco (sidestream smoke).¹⁸ Thus, Nonsmokers who are routinely exposed to environmental smoke are at increased risk for some of the same diseases that afflict smokers, including lung cancer and cardiovascular disease.¹⁹

In Nigeria today, although the exact number of smokers remains debated, one may agree with Adeloye *et al.* that smokers in Nigeria were around 10.4%, with a lower prevalence among women.²⁰ There are various initiatives launched by the Nigerian government to eradicate the proliferation of this social vice. Some of such initiatives include the World Health Organization (WHO), Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC), and National Tobacco Control (NTC). Despite these initiatives, research reveals that the prevalence of smoking in the country continues at the rate of 4% per year.²¹ However, any attempt to give a detailed account of smoking cases in Nigeria would make the paper bulky and voluminous.

There are many approaches that Islam employs to protect the health of Muslims. One such approach is the prohibition of indulging in harmful acts or consumption of materials like smoking that are detrimental to life or even hasten the extinction of life. One of the verses of the Qur'an that expounded this prohibition is as follows:

Do not put yourselves into destruction by your own hand (Qur'an 2: 195).

Zakariyya, in his commentary, uses another religious cum spiritual approach to eradicate the vices of smoking in an environment is the deprivation and prevention of a Muslim dying person from reciting the *Kalimah* (testifying that there is none worthy of worship except Allah) because of his involvement in sin such as smoking, drug addiction and so on. It is on this note that Zakariyya put down the following:

The scholars say that opium has seventy disadvantages, one of which is that the opium-user cannot recollect the *Kalimah*

(testifying that there is none worthy of worship except Allah) at the time of his death.²²

Fraud

Part of the objectives of Islamic law is to provide a better life and protection of wealth. It condemns any act that leads to deception, imbalance, and gross misrepresentation, among others. One of the general names for these condemned acts is fraud. It is defined as the act of deceiving another by deploying misleading means in the form of actions or words, thus inducing the other to transact where he would not have transacted had such means not been deployed.²³ It is classified into two broad categories, which are as follows:²⁴

- i. **Fraud by action:** This involves any act that is in tandem with a false act, imbalance, deception, lesion and misrepresentation, such as manoeuvres, reducing weighing scale, etc.
- ii. **Fraud by Statement:** It involves any statement that is in tandem with lying, false oath on selling, dishonesty, breach of pact, disloyal, etc.

Part of what can be inferred from Zakariyya's discussion in his book is that for an individual who aims at attaining eternal success and, by extension, eradicating social vice is a condemnation of fraud. He quoted the following to condemn the act of fraud:

It is related about one man that, when he was persuaded before his death to recite the *Kalimah* (testifying that there is none worthy of worship except Allah). He expressed his inability to recite, because he said, he used to cheat through underweighting.²⁵

He also put down the following statement as another way to eradicate the social vice of cheating or deceiving others. He quotes that the part of the branches of belief includes being truthful and honest in dealing with others in every aspect of social dealings. This statement goes thus:

Not to deceive, cheat or suspect others.²⁶ The deprivation against the mercy of Allah at the time of death is enough as a reflection to ponder on the importance of the condemnation of fraud or cheating.

Hoodlums

Hoodlums can be defined as violent criminals or troublemakers.²⁷ This social vice in Nigeria society has risen to its zenith that hardly a month passes without hearing the news of hoodlums from media sources. While many reports of such were not echoed by the media, many citizens are suffering from this dehumanised act in the country. It is, therefore, important to take pragmatic action to curtail the acts of hoodlums so as to restore the lost security of the nation. For instance, an unidentified man and two soldiers were killed by hoodlums in Umenze community and environs in Orumba South Local Council of Anambra State.²⁸

Islam considers peace of life essential as a sacred thing that is not allowed to be detrimental or cause death even by the owner of the soul, let alone another man's soul. This is why Islam prohibits committing suicide in all ramifications. In the same vein, Islam regards saving other peoples' lives as a meritorious service that is encouraged and rewarded. The Qur'an speaks on this premise that:

Verily, whoever kills a person, unless it be for murder or for spreading mischief in the land, it would be as if he kills the entire mankind, and if anyone saves a life, it would be as if he saves the life of the entire mankind. (Qur'an 5:32)

Part of Zakariyya's discussion in his book is to eradicate this social vice from the environment through the prophetic statement. In his commentary on the branches of belief, he highlights some of the religious dictates that are pragmatic to eradicate any act, such as hoodlums, that are detrimental to society. These dictates are as follows:²⁹

1. Not to be the cause of trouble and loss to others.
2. To clear troublesome obstructions from the way.
3. To work for the betterment of mutual relations, including punishing the wrong-doers and making efforts against the rebels.
4. To carry out the punishments enjoined by religion (for specific offences).

From the above list, it can be concluded that acts of hoodlums had to be eradicated in society. Also, every individual has to strive not to be the cause of trouble and loss to others. In the same vein, the function of the government is to eradicate any vice that is affecting the populace. By doing this, the betterment of the country will be enhanced, and social sustainability will be developed.

Conclusion

It can be concluded from the foregoing that social vices in contemporary Nigerian society have been affecting the harmony and peace of the country. Despite all the initiatives and measures put in place by the government, the situation remains stagnant or even worse. Thus, there is a need for several attempts towards eradicating these social vices. No doubt researches on how to identify and proffer solutions to these vices have been carried out, but the situation persists. Thus, this paper employed religious cum spiritual approach.

Zakariyya, a religio-spiritual and Islamic scholar, attempted to employ his book to solve different facets of the life of a Muslim. It has been observed that his work, *Faḍā'il-ʿAmāl* that, which was solely compiled as a book of virtues, can equally *pari passu* takes care of various facets of life ranging from social, marital, religious, spiritual and so on. It could be recalled from his discussion that through inferences and reflections, his submissions would eradicate the present social vices to the barest minimum. For instance, if the items listed by him under the issue of hoodlums, which is a combination of both government and citizen responsibilities, are put into implementation, the issue of hoodlums would be eradicated to the barest level.

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