**‘Values are no longer prescriptive but a matter of choice.’ To what extent is this true? (RI Prelim)**

Introduction

* Definition of values – set of beliefs that form the basis of our behaviours and attitudes, that we use as a moral compass allowing us to make moral judgments
* Notion of the quote – it suggests that our values are no longer inherited, inculcated, indoctrinated but developed according to the prerogative of the individuals
* To examine the extent of the agreement, we need to assess whether our values are still inherited, inculcated or indoctrinated by our family, society and political institutions and whether the individuals possess the capacity to develop their values independently.

Body

The focus of the discussion is to show how the individuals are influenced and shaped in the development of their values from the various aspects and deduce from it the extent of agreement to the proposition.

1) Individual development

Advocates of individualism believe that values are not prescribed as the education received by the individuals and opportunities for empowerment imbued in them the capacity to cultivate their values – manifest in the development of sub-cultures – with unorthodox and unique behaviours and values which differ from the traditional ethnic and cultural environment – individuals have the intelligence and rational capacity to think for themselves – as stated by Locke , individuals ‘have the perfect freedom to order their actions according the law of nature’. Furthermore, the presence of new media technology like YouTube and Facebook which will provide them venues to prescribe their own development- opportunities for expression

However, detractors do not share the view – as individuals are easily manipulated by the influence of institutions as in the way, they are manipulated by the omnipresence of the mass media. Secondly, individuals are product of the culture as they are social beings who are constantly in need to interact in the society and it is inevitable for them to be indoctrinated and inculcated by the society and the political institutions and naturally inherited with traditional values.

2) Family heritage

Family heritage is one source of influence that will prescribe our values – our traditional cultural and ethnic values are instilled in us since young through our interaction with our parents and the extended family – we share the beliefs of our family as they are first stage of reference in our lives.

However, the diminishing functional roles of family in the modern era undermine the influence of the family – minimizing the influence of the inherited values – family interaction is trivialized and has become less interactive –reduces the understanding and undermining the acceptance of the values – In this way, the values of the individuals are not prescribed by the family as very few will adhere to traditional family values

3) Social and religious inculcation

But the influence from the social and religious institutions are more significant – religion is the source of moral guidance – an inspiration for our development – the divine power play a very extensive influence on our values – the moral compass that will influence our ethical values – shape the content of lives. Our needs for social acceptance as a social being explains the importance of the social superstructures in prescribing our values – we conform to the values of the society we live in to gain social acceptance - the sense of belonging is significant – peer beliefs and social norm is significance to the individuals – individuals need the social and emotional acceptance – to achieve this, individuals will accept the prescribed values of the society to gain community acceptance.

**What are the factors undermining the influence of the social and religious institutions in shaping the values of the individuals?**

4) Political Indoctrination

The influence of the political institutions is difficult to ignore as individuals need the political framework for his development and assurance of his rights in the society. According to John Jacque Rousseau, individuals need to adhere to the ‘will of all’ which are the core values of the entity if they choose to live in this society and in doing so, the values of the individuals in the society are prescribed. In Singapore, our core values of meritocracy, racial tolerance and secular status are constantly indoctrinated in our National Education programmes and other social and political campaigns. Although such programmes are not enforced, they are implemented through social activities and promotional campaigns to educate the masses. By virtue of these intentions, we seek to create a Singapore identity with our unique social values

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**Conclusion**

In the contemporary world where individualism is constantly emphasized, it gives an illusion that the individuals can no longer prescribe to social and political values. Although individuals are given more opportunities more interact and are highly education, the influences of the respective social institutions are still immense and would never cease to prescribe the values of the individuals.