

## **Discussion**

The goal of this study was to examine moral reasoning among children, adolescents and adults in India using the cultural-developmental approach. The first two studies were mixed methods studies that tested the cultural-developmental template (Jensen, 2008, 2011, 2015). With the use of cross-sectional and longitudinal analysis, results illuminated distinct patterns of ethic use among children and adolescents in India—both in the degree as well as the types of moral reasons employed. The third study was a qualitative study with adult participants, which explored indigenous concepts in moral reasoning using an emic approach. Results highlighted the use of indigenous moral concepts among adults and salient aspects of the Indian moral worldview. In the present chapter, findings are discussed in light of three main parts-

1. Reflections on the contributions of the cultural-developmental approach in the study of moral reasoning among children, adolescents and adults in India.
2. Contributions of the indigenous, emic approach to the study of moral reasoning and recommendations for the Big Three Ethics manual.
3. Methodological insights in the study of moral reasoning

### **The Cultural- Developmental Approach: Contributions and Reflections**

The cultural-developmental approach enables the mapping of ethic use across age groups and cultural communities, thereby elucidating distinct patterns of moral reasoning within and across diverse cultures. For the present study, the approach generated distinct developmental patterns for the use of Autonomy, Community, and Divinity in Indian children and adolescents. Contrary to the cultural-developmental template hypothesis (Figure 1, p. 9) where the degree of use of the Ethic of Autonomy was proposed to remain relatively stable across childhood and adolescence, the present findings suggested a significant increase in the use of Autonomy from childhood to adolescence (Figure 18). This increase in the use of Autonomy corresponded with

an increase in the diversity of the types of moral concepts used within this ethic. It is important to note that while research in Western cultures suggests a greater concern with individual rights and equity among adolescent participants (Killen, 2002; Walker, 1989), adolescents in India spoke of moral concepts that reflected a greater concern with virtues and psychological wellbeing of self and others.

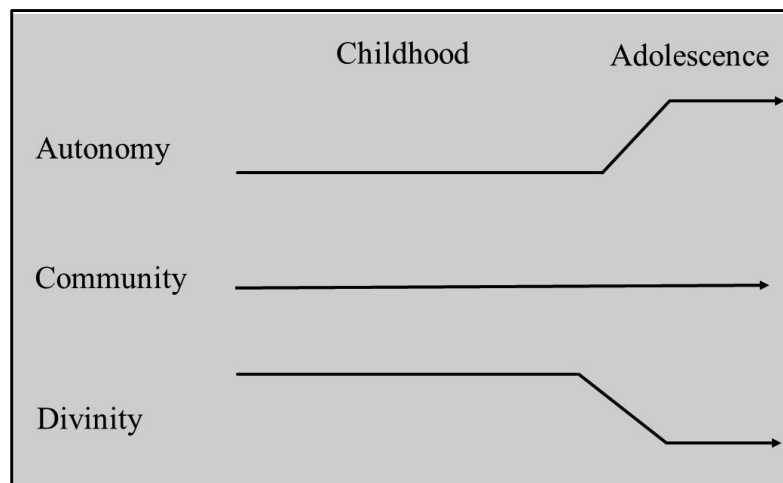
With respect to the Ethic of Community, while the template hypothesis predicts an increase in the use of Community in adolescence, the present findings showed continuity in the degree of use of this ethic between childhood and adolescence, although the types of moral concepts used evolved and increased with age. This finding lends support to research that gives evidence for the early awareness and understanding of aspects of social membership, expectations and obligations in moral reasoning among Indian children and adolescents (Goyal et al., 2019). Children and adolescents also spoke of indigenous duty concepts such as *faraj*, *zimedari* and *kartavya*. They also reflected a deep concern for *beizzati* (the loss of honor) when reasoning about their moral decisions. This highlights foundations of an encompassing sense of self (Mascolo et al., 2004) that is embedded in close relationships and an inherent concern for others.

Lastly, the Ethic of Divinity was expected to be low among children, to rise in adolescence and become similar to adult use of this ethic. However, Jensen (2015) stated this hypothesis with the acknowledgment that this may be true only for cultures that emphasize scriptural authority or where people conceive of supernatural entities (e.g., God) as largely distinct from humans. This is not the case in India, where selfhood and godhood are not seen as distinct but an enmeshed whole (Tripathi & Ghildyal, 2013). The present findings therefore, showed a unique trajectory for the development of the Ethic of Divinity in Indian childhood and

adolescence. As hypothesized, findings showed that divinity emerged as early as middle childhood, and its use decreased in the course of adolescence. One possible explanation is that during the course of adolescence, as autonomy considerations are on the rise and community considerations remain steady, the understanding of divinity also undergoes transformations—a developmental shift from an almost- exclusive focus on punishment avoidance from God or *paap*, to a more mature, abstract and positive relationship with God, with the trust that God will ensure our wellbeing and be supportive rather than a source of punishment and discipline alone. These developmental trends could potentially be precursors to a fully-developed understanding of *shraddhā* in adult life. More research is needed to understand the use of divinity, which is often reduced to religion and seldom examined in mainstream psychology even though divinity is an important motivator of human thought and behavior (Shweder, 2015).

**Figure 18**

*Resultant Template for the Use of the Three Ethics across Childhood and Adolescence in India*



*Note.* Each of the lines shows developmental patterns across childhood and adolescence. The positions of the lines do *not* indicate the relative frequency in relation to one another (e.g. use of Autonomy being more frequent than use of Community and Divinity).

Overall, these results were reflected in the developmental trajectories generated in the study, where the degree of use of Autonomy is highest, followed by Divinity and lastly,

Community in childhood. Whereas by adolescence, Autonomy is followed by Community and lastly, Divinity considerations. While longitudinal analysis provides confidence and credibility to these developmental findings, more research, especially across social class is needed in India to explore and confirm these findings.

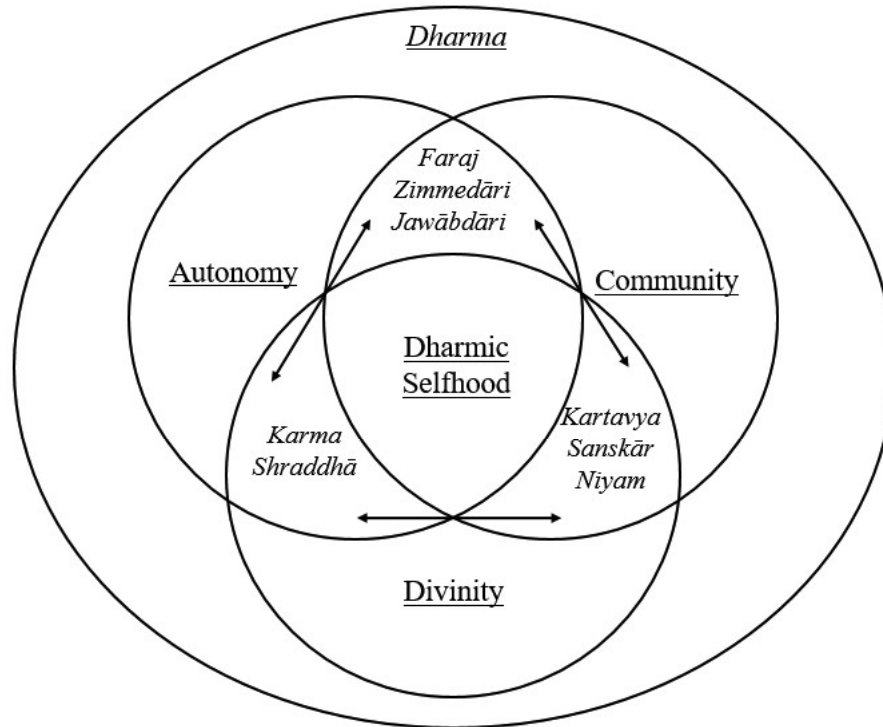
### **The Indian Moral Worldview and its Contributions to the Big Three Ethics Framework**

The Big Three Ethics conceptualize the moral self as comprising different, albeit not incompatible conceptions of a person (2015). The framework acknowledges that the self can be autonomous, a member of social groups, and spiritual all at once, thereby legitimizing that all three aspects of the self are pertinent to moral reasoning on an equal footing. This pluralistic conceptualization of moral selfhood provides a strong premise to the study of moral reasoning in the Indian cultural context, where the self is complex, multifaceted and not a bounded entity with distinct boundaries of an independent self as conceptualized in Western cultures (Malscolo et al., 2004).

Findings from the present study highlighted distinct cultural- developmental trends and indigenous concepts in the use of the three ethics. However, mapping indigenous concepts onto the Three Ethics framework presented several challenges stemming from the fluid nature of selfhood that emerged from participants' moral reasoning-- one that blended into and encompassed all the three ethics. These overlaps are depicted in Figure 19 and are discussed below, with the aim of mobilizing future research to expand the Three Ethics framework and to make it more suitable for the study of Indian moral reasoning. Such an expansion will also allow for cross-cultural examinations and comparisons to study the prevalence of important indigenous concepts of selfhood that are relevant to morality within and across cultures.

**Figure 19**

*Selfhood in the Indian Moral Worldview: An Intersection of the Three Ethics*



### **Intersection of Autonomy and Community Considerations**

*Dharma* comprises adherence to a moral and natural order. It includes performance of duties that pertain to one's station in life and is therefore a socio-moral principle that guides an individual for righteous action. Participants in the study used indigenous concepts of responsibility and duty such as *faraj*, *zimmedari*, and *jawābdari* to refer to their *dharma*. In the Three Ethics manual, responsibility is listed as a moral concept within the Ethic of Autonomy and is defined as taking responsibility for one's own actions (or failing to do so). It does not include taking responsibilities for others. Duty is listed within the Ethic of Community as an obligation to behave in certain ways, under certain circumstances due to one's social status or position.

However, the idea of personal responsibility (for the self) seldom emerged in participants' reasoning as a stand-alone reason. Instead, participants spoke of one's personal responsibility in the context of their social roles (as a friend, son/daughter, citizen, neighbor, team member) and obligations towards relationships, and social groups, making it difficult to separate personal responsibility from social duty (distinctions in the manual). For example, an adolescent explained "I should tell them the truth about the broken Ganesh idol because I broke it and as a member of the (housing) society, it is my duty to let them know, avoid stress and disharmony. I cannot go on with my regular day in the same society feeling at ease if others around me are upset. I must take responsibility for my actions and how they have affected my neighbors." Therefore, such responses prominently reflected a sense of self that encompassed others and prioritized being in harmonious relationships on an everyday basis.

### **Intersection of Community and Divinity Considerations**

Customary traditional authority and the indigenous concept of *kartavya* could be coded under both Community and Divinity ethics using the manual. When seen from the perspective of the Indian moral worldview, and as articulated by adult respondents, this awareness of the importance of everyday customs, traditions and one's *kartavya* towards them was inculcated through *sanskārs* (beliefs and practices repeated in familial and cultural upbringing) and *niyam* (discipline, rules).

Participants spoke of age-old traditions and customs having a divine basis and as passed on by ancestors for the welfare of future generations. All major festivals, life events and celebrations in life that mark birth, death, accomplishments or new beginnings (marriage, retirement or employment) were also seen as having social as well as divine *kārmic* roots and implications. Similarly, because the self, encompassed the other, and divinity was believed to be

in oneself and others, one's social and spiritual *kartavya* or duties/responsibilities became fused rather than differentiated. For example, one adolescent mentioned: "If I am there to see that the kitten is suffering then I am there for a reason. If I can save a life or remove someone's suffering then that is my *kartavya*, it is what I must do. We are fortunate to get the opportunity to serve others, especially when it is about saving a life." Therefore, the two ethics co-existed in participants' reasoning and were merged in their conceptualization and articulation.

Further, in a study on *kartavya* among married Indian adults, Bhangaokar and Kapadia (2019) bring forth complex gender-role issues at the intersection of autonomy and community. The study supported claims by Menon (2002) who highlighted that Hindu (Oriya) women considered themselves as powerful agents who could hold together or break their conjugal homes through their actions and behaviors. Therefore, through self-control, self-refinement and service to others, women became more powerful in domains of everyday life and moved closer to the achievement of *dhārmik sakti* or moral purity.

Additionally, the present findings showed that although Divinity declined adolescence onwards, the prominence of *kartavya* - performing one's duties well and fulfilling responsibilities in many spheres of life - in adult responses about moral worldviews cannot be ignored. This is an embodiment of *dharma*. Ancient Indian tales from the Mahabharata (Devagupta, 2017) firmly establish that efficient and selfless performance of *grihastha dharma* (duties of a householder) for both men and women, paves the way for *moksha* (spiritual liberation), like any other. More research is therefore needed to examine the lived experiences of *kartavya* as a core concept where all three ethics coalesce. When a concept carries across ethics, it may be particularly powerful in motivating moral behaviors, including difficult or demanding moral behaviors such as altruistic ones, precisely because it taps into more aspects of a person.

## Intersections of Divinity and Autonomy Considerations

Children's responses demonstrated an overwhelming concern with punishment avoidance (from God) within the Ethic of Divinity, thereby showing reliance on external authority (God). This preoccupation with punishment avoidance eased with age, as adolescents considered a broader variety of Divinity concepts including virtues, other's physical wellbeing, customary traditional authority, and God's authority. Adult responses however, reflected the centrality of the self in moral thought and action by attributing all events and outcomes as indisputably tied to one's *karma*, in view of one's *dharma*. Therefore, self-development in India is essentially embedded in a *dhārmic* framework (Bhangaokar, 2020), and individual *karma*, is seen as more powerful than the idea of God.

Parallel evolution and abstraction was seen in the conceptualization of God and one's dynamics with God in childhood, adolescence and adulthood. For example, what emerged as a myopic view of God as an agent of moral policing—keeping records of good and bad actions and delivering rewards and punishments to individuals in childhood, changed to the idea of God as a provider, protector, friend and well-wisher in adolescence. Further, through the course of adulthood, this idea and dynamic with God evolved again. Adults expressed that God was merely a belief, a matter of *shraddhā* or faith that kept one going. God was seen as a superpower or a *Shakti* or energy constituted within the self, responsible for the good and bad that one experienced in life as a result of one's individual *karma*. Further, the idea of God was not limited to these descriptions alone. For example, individuals may worship Krishna in the human form and yet, have the full range awareness of God being formless, genderless, omnipresent (also in all forms of life), and within our own selves. Following is an excerpt from *Ādi Sankara's*



*Nirvaana Shatakam (or Ātma Shatakam)* that explains this basic principle of the Indian worldview:

अहं निर्विकल्पो निराकाररूपो

विभुत्वाच्च सर्वत्र सर्वेन्द्रियाणाम् ।

न चासङ्गतं नैव मुक्तिर्न मेयः

चिदानन्दरूपः शिवोऽहम् शिवोऽहम् ॥६॥

I am devoid of duality, my form is formlessness,

I exist everywhere, pervading all senses,

I am neither attached, neither free nor captive,

I am the form of consciousness and bliss,

I am the eternal Shiva... (Shlokam, 2021)

Participant responses also highlighted dualities as inescapable and integral to one's self (Ramanujan, 1990). *Dukh* and *sukh*, *shakti* and negative energy, good and bad qualities were all seen as a part of one's self. The aim was to find a *madhyam mārg* or middle path (Panda, 2013), to avoid extremes for a meaningful, harmonious life and to keep a check on suffering brought about by the extremes. Banavathy and Choudry (2014) explain *Vedantic* ideas of happiness as a taxonomy that includes *sukha* (happiness) and *Ānanda* (eternal bliss). So, although *sukh* and *Ānanda* are used as synonyms of happiness in common language, *dukḥ* stands in contrast with *sukh*, thereby exemplifying duality. However, the experience of *Ānanda* (pure transcendental bliss) goes beyond these dualities and embodies the true nature of the *Ātman* or pure self. To move beyond dualities thus becomes a higher aim in the path to self-realization as expressed in the excerpt from *Nirvaana Shatakam*.

The comfort with dualities in the Indian mind set and discourse, the harmonious co-existence of ethics, the blending of the types of reasons into more than one ethic and lastly, the interface of multiple layers of the socio-cultural ethos including multilingualism, social class, context and culture together raise the question: Given their complexity and fluidity, how do we capture and measure indigenous moral concepts that do not fit into exclusive categories of the Big Three Ethics manual?

### **Methodological Insights**

The first two studies were mixed-method studies, and employed the joint use of quantitative and qualitative methods to study the three ethics among children and adolescents. Maxwell (2013) outlines distinct advantages of mixed-methods research. First, while time consuming and complex, the mixed-methods design allows for triangulation, i.e. to see if methods with different strengths and weaknesses support the same conclusions. Second, different methods have the potential to inform us of different dimensions or divergent perspectives in the phenomena being studied, thereby broadening our scope of understanding the phenomena rather than simply confirming the same conclusions. For example, in study two, quantitative analysis showed that children's use of Autonomy rose significantly in adolescence. This result has limited meaning unless qualitative research informs us of the shifts in the types of reasons used within Autonomy and their cultural relevance. For example, qualitative analysis revealed the amplified use of virtues in adolescence and that most Autonomy- oriented virtues were used in relation to others or in the context of relationships, providing evidence for a relational self, which is integral to the Indian moral worldview. Therefore, with its focus on the degree and types of moral reasons within each ethic, the cultural developmental approach proved effective in addressing the interface of culture and moral development. It naturally lends itself to mixed-methods research.

Additionally, the three ethics manual enabled the researcher to capture a diverse pool of moral concepts within Autonomy, Community, and Divinity.

Steeped in the Indian moral worldview, the present data still presented several challenges while using the coding manual (see Figure 19). It is clear, that the way forward is to use the cultural-developmental approach to map indigenous worldviews and concepts using emic qualitative methods. This will enable a more comprehensive understanding of what all can constitute morality.

Indigenous epistemologies and theorizing thus, have the potential to illuminate divergent moral concepts and worldviews, thereby contributing to mainstream psychology and paving the way for a truly global psychology, one that is not dominated by worldviews of the WEIRD cultures alone (Henrich et al., 2010).