Review of Literature

Early Theories in Moral Psychology

Cognitive Development Approach

Piaget (1932) was one of the earliest scholars to contribute to the developmental study of moral reasoning. As a proponent of the constructivist approach, Piaget asserted that children are active participants in their own learning and development. Thus, they develop a sense of right and wrong in the context of social interactions, observations and experiences. Piaget was primarily interested not in what children do, but in their ways of thinking and reasoning about three major moral issues, namely rules, moral responsibility, and justice. He believed that children's ideas about these issues changed as they grew older. His theory of moral development included two major stages of moral development- (1) Heteronomous morality (moral realism), and (2) Autonomous morality (moral relativism).

Heteronomous Morality (5-10 years). In this stage, Piaget believed that morality was imposed externally. Therefore, rules were made by authority figures (parents, teachers, elders) and required strict obedience. These rules were seen as absolute and non-negotiable. Rules were unchangeable and therefore same for everyone, across time or circumstances. One's behavior was judged as good or bad in light of consequences rather than intentions, and breaking a rule resulted in immediate and severe punishment (immanent justice). Additionally, collective punishment was seen as acceptable and just.

Autonomous Morality (10 years to adolescence). In the autonomous stage, Piaget believed that children understood morality as guided by their own rules and principles. They understood that rules can be flexible, socially agreed upon principles and therefore subject to change and negotiation. Additionally, Piaget proposed that in this stage, intentions rather than consequences served as the basis for judging behavior as right or wrong. He also suggested that in this stage,

children were able to move beyond the egocentrism of the previous stage and consider moral issues from the standpoint of other individuals and their circumstances. Additionally, children understood that there may not be perfect justice in real life, so the innocent maybe held guilty and the guilty may get away with a crime. Unlike in heteronomous morality, collective punishment or punishment awarded to the innocent for the misdeeds of the guilty was seen as unfair and unjust.

The Piagetian perspective gave massive impetus to research in the area of children's moral reasoning and continues to have a dominant presence in contemporary moral psychology (Acar, 2022; Kazi & Galanaki, 2019; Oesterdiekhoff, 2013). Research gives legitimacy to several aspects of Piaget's propositions. For example, research confirmed that young children believed in immanent justice and that this belief weakened with increasing age, thereby confirming a 'robust' developmental trend (Jose, 1991). Research also supported Piaget's claim that older children develop an objective sense of moral responsibility that allows them to prioritize intentions over outcomes (Lickona, 1976).

Other aspects of Piaget's theory have received critique. Piaget used observations and clinical interviews with a very small sample. Additionally, Piaget's methods and procedures were not standardized, thereby raising questions of reliability. He proposed that moral maturity peaks in middle adolescence (corresponding to the formal operations stage in his theory of cognitive development). This seemed to suggest that the highest level of moral maturity could be reached by adolescence. However, the absence of adult participants in his study was critiqued, considering that so much of the research available on adult moral reasoning stems from his theory (McDonald & Stuart-Hamilton, 1996). Further, Piaget underestimated children's rate of

development. Research shows that young children can distinguish between intentions and outcomes in the heterogeneous stage of Piaget's theory (Berg-Cross, 1975; Nelson, 1980).

Kohlberg' Stage Theory of Moral Development

Lawrence Kohlberg (1981) modified and extended Piaget's work and went on to develop a series of three levels and six stages in moral development from childhood and adulthood. Like Piaget, Kohlberg believed that moral reasoning was related to cognition. However, Kohlberg also asserted that moral understanding develops independent of social relations. He argued that development of moral understanding is related to the development of skills of rational thought including the ability to distance oneself from subjective feelings and develop an impartial point of view from which one evaluates right and wrong objectively. According to Kohlberg, children develop a sense of moral understanding by resolving cognitive conflicts within their minds. Kohlberg (1981) made the assumption that autonomy and rationality was reflective of a higher level of moral development. Kohlberg and Power (1981) asserted that morality is independent of religion and that moral education should be based on universal principles of justice and fairness.

He proposed three universal, hierarchical and invariant levels of moral development, namely the pre-conventional, conventional and post-conventional levels. Each level has two sub-stages. This well-known stage theory given by Kohlberg has been used extensively to understand moral development. Colby et al. (1983) carried out a longitudinal study with 58 male participants of Kohlberg's original study and confirmed Kohlberg's original conclusion, supporting the universal, invariant progression of moral development.

Strong criticism for Kohlberg's theory came from one of his research assistants- Carol Gilligan. Gilligan (1977, 1995), asserted that Kohlberg's theorization was androcentric. She

argued that Kohlberg's model was developed from an all-male sample and emphasized on justice as the major parameter to measure moral development. Gilligan (1977) interviewed both boys and girls using Kohlberg's original scenarios. Her findings showed that boys predominantly used logic to evaluate moral scenarios, whereas girls responded in terms of relationships. She concluded that men's morality was based on abstract principles of laws and justice, whereas women's morality was based on care and compassion. Therefore, she proposed that Kohlberg's scheme was gender-biased against women, thereby not providing women with the equal opportunity to score high on moral maturity. Kohlberg eventually acknowledged that she was right (Kohlberg et al, 1983, as cited in Graham et al., 2013). Gilligan went on to develop the two orientations approach and claimed that there exist two forms of moral orientations, namely, the justice orientation among men and care orientation among women. However, researches who subsequently explored links between gender and morality were largely inconclusive. For example, a research in India and Japan suggests that both men and women show the justice as well as care orientation (Miller & Bersoff, 1995; Miller et al. 1990). Nevertheless, Gilligan's work encouraged future researchers to broaden the scope of morality, in order to include gendered perspectives and those beyond the ethics of justice.

Several researches across cultures have reported that Kohlberg's scheme fails to consider several other moral principles and concepts that are integral to diverse cultures. For example, some concepts unique to the Indian philosophy such as *Ahimsa* were unscorable using the Kohlberg's coding manual, even though it is regarded as one of the highest moral virtues (Vasudev, 1994). Similarly, Huebner and Garrod (1991) argued that moral views of Tibetan Buddhist monks were remarkably different from Kohlberg's views. For example, they draw attention to the moral significance of *dukkha* or suffering in the *karmic* world of Tibetan monks,

which centers on the ability to undo negative *karma* by preventing and being sensitive to the suffering of others, including fellow non-human beings. Huebner and Garrod (1991) strongly questioned Kohlberg's claim for a universal theoretical model in moral psychology and advocated for the need to explore alternate ideologies and moral worldviews of the non-western world. Metz and Gaie (2010) present the Sub-Saharan moral theory that privileges harmonious communal relationships over individuality, thereby making Kohlberg's sixth stage culturally unachievable and in fact, amoral/undesirable in Africa. Researchers across cultures, therefore, found that the Kohlberg manual was inadequate in acknowledging moral concepts pertaining to community, collectivity, interdependence as well as religion, divinity and spirituality (Edwards, 1987; Shweder & Much, 1991; Vasudev & Hummel, 1987). The cultural appropriateness of Kohlberg's theory has long been debated, especially the claim of universality and the neglect for community as well as religious concepts in moral discourse. In retrospection, Kohlberg pondered over the possibility of a seventh stage, which linked religion with moral reasoning (Kohlberg, et al., 1983).

Social Domain Theory

The Social Domain Theory (SDT) of moral psychology was developed by Elliot Turiel, Judith Smetana and Larry Nucci. While Kohlberg studied how morality develops, Turiel and colleagues aimed to understand what constitutes moral understanding and whether children can differentiate between moral and non-moral issues. After Gilligan's critique of Kohlberg's framework, the discipline of moral psychology had accepted the duality of the ethics of justice and care. Unlike Kohlberg's levels of moral development, Turiel (1983, 2002) proposed three universal domains of social-moral understanding, namely the moral, conventional and personal domains. He asserted that the moral domain distinctly involved issues that involved a concern for

the rights (to include Kohlberg's emphasis on justice) and the welfare of others (to include Gilligan's emphasis on care). The conventional domain included actions whose status as right or wrong is determined by social norms and customs, whereas all actions with consequences primarily on the self were included in the personal domain that was private and discrete. Research on SDT was focused on whether children and adolescents could clearly distinguish between moral and non-moral events and if corresponding domains of reasoning were different.

In a study, Nucci (1981) used a series of sorting tasks with 80 participants between seven to twenty years of age to establish whether children and adolescents could conceptually distinguish between personal, moral and conventional moral matters. Overall, findings highlighted that participants ranked moral violations as more wrong compared to conventional ones, followed by the private ones. Research findings also suggest that children were more likely to respond to moral events, and their interest in conventional events emerged with increasing age (Nucci & Nucci, 1982). Moral transgressions also were seen as more unacceptable and more deserving of punishment than conventional transgressions (Yoo & Smetana, 2022). In contrast, adults were more likely to consider conventional events as crucial.

A major assertion of the social domain theorists is that morality and autonomy are interspersed and integral to early development. In a study with pre-school children, Killen and Nucci (1995) found that children's justifications for personal claims co-existed with their emerging justifications for fairness. Recent research also gives evidence for the role of socialization and parent-child or parent-adolescent relationships in the development of autonomy and the understanding of moral norms (Jambon & Smetana, 2019; Smetana & Rote, 2019)

Several studies done with children belonging to diverse cultures suggest that the domain approach is not universally applicable due to the difference in culture- specific conceptions of the

moral, conventional and personal (Edwards, 1987; Miller & Bersoff, 1995; Pandya et al., 2021). Additionally, research also shows that autonomy is not given utmost importance pan culturally (Tripathi et al., 2018). For example, Confucian cultures are likely to give preference to the joy of fulfilling obligations, which also constitute personal agency (Buchtel et al., 2018; Miller et al., 2011; Tripathi et al., 2018)

A major critique for the traditional perspectives, including that of the cognitive-developmental and social domain theories, is the claim for universality in the development of moral reasoning. In doing so, they restrict themselves to the dominant Euro-Western frameworks of morality that are inadequate in exploring the complexity and diversity in perspectives, theories, models, and philosophies that non-Western worldviews offer.

The Cultural Psychological Perspective

The cultural-psychological perspective presumes that culture shapes development, beginning early in life. It aims to understand cultural practices and mentalities, without separating the individual from the cultural context but instead considering both as inseparable wholes, as they are interdependent and interspersed. The underlying assumption is that cultural traditions and social practices become a part of the human psyche and foster cultural divergences in human development processes rather than psychic unity (Shweder, 1990). This perspective examines the existence of multiple divergent mentalities (psychic pluralism), claiming that although basic potentials of the human mind are universal, their actual form and functioning are highly context-specific.

The cultural psychological perspective understands culture as an intentional world made up of intentional beings (Shweder, 1990). To be able to sustain what they value as important and good, individuals and groups transmit both behavioral (practices) as well as symbolic

(mentalities) aspects of a culture over generations. It is also important to note that cultural psychology views individuals as intentional agents. Therefore Shweder (1990) asserts that human beings are intrinsically motivated to derive meanings and resources from their socio-cultural environment through participation in an evolving intentional world which is a product, and an expression, of the mental representations that make it up. Studies in human development conducted with a cultural psychological perspective indicate an urgent need to be wary of the tendency to look for psychological universals and make disciplines like human development culture-inclusive.

The field of moral psychology has evolved over the years. Through cultural and cross-cultural research, contemporary moral psychology has moved beyond rigid objective (logical, autonomous, rationally justifiable) standards of moral thought (Piaget, 1932) to acknowledging multiple cultural realities and moral philosophies. It is well-established through research that early theories in moral psychology (Kohlberg, 1981; Turiel, 2002) have a unitary focus on moral concepts related to autonomy and do not adequately capture moral reasoning pertaining to community, collectivity, and interdependence, as well as religion, divinity and spirituality (Gilligan, 1982, Huebner & Garrod, 1991; Jensen, 2011; Shweder & Much, 1991).

These early theories have been questioned for their universal claims about development, devoid of context or culture. In recent decades, it has been increasingly recognized that culture matters, and that human behaviour and development is situated in particular sociocultural contexts. Scholars have therefore, called for moral psychology to include more than one kind of moral reasoning (Jensen, 2020; Miller, 1994; Padilla-Walker & Carlo, 2014; Shweder et al., 2003; Trommsdorff, 2012) thereby rejecting radical rationalism. Embracing pluralism in the study of morality has the potential for a more global, inclusive basis for developing stronger

theories and methods in moral psychology which helps the discipline move beyond imperialist views that have long dominated, and to understand non-WEIRD worlds (Henrich et al., 2010).

Research by Shweder et al. (1990) played a major role in this expansion. Their work epitomized the postmodern insistence on culture as intrinsic to human behavior and development. As a post structural pluralist anthropologist, Shweder critiqued the rationalist view for promoting a unitary worldview that is ignorant of diversity and differences in human development. His work encouraged a "view from manywheres" (Shweder, 2003) to understand the variety of ways in which people around the world think and believe. Through extensive anthropological and ethnographic work in Orissa, India, Shweder asserted that long-standing ideas invested in cultural meaning and developed as indigenous theories have the potential to "extend our moral imagination" (Shweder, 2003, p.75) beyond Euro-American perspectives. Shweder challenged Piaget's understanding of ideas like sin, transmigration of souls, animism, immanent justice and the sacred self as characteristic of primitive and superstitious thought. Shweder acknowledged that in India, the self was believed to be sacred, and *dharma* was conceptualized as an individual's obligations shaped by the precision of one's *karma* (actions) as well as features of one's social position such as one's age, gender, relationships and more. These ideas of the self, ran counter to the dominant Euro-American scientific discourse in moral psychology. In order to accommodate these ideas in the study of morality, Shweder et al. (1990) proposed the Big Three Ethics of morality. Unlike the early theories in moral psychology, the Big Three Ethics framework included not just autonomy, but also community and divinity as integral aspects of moral thought and reasoning. This broadening of the scope of morality acknowledged indigenous, non-Western moral worldviews.

Contemporary Moral Psychology

An emerging focus in research on moral psychology is how to theorize and research the development of plural kinds of reasoning, and the extent to which such developmental trajectories vary across cultures. Obtaining this knowledge is important in order to describe, explain, and predict moral development in a manner that is valid both across and within cultures (Harkness & Super, 2020; Thalmayer et al., 2021). In turn, such knowledge is crucial as the basis for applied interventions and policies (Harkness & Super, 2021). The cultural-developmental approach to moral psychology has been proposed as a novel way to conceptualize the development of the Ethics of Autonomy, Community, and Divinity—across different cultures (Jensen, 2008, 2011, 2015). The approach lays out developmental trajectories for the degree of use of the three ethics. These trajectories are flexible rather than fixed, and accommodate cultural differences. The approach also involves coding for the various types or moral concepts used within each ethic. This enables the preservation of cultural concepts and meanings integral to moral philosophies held by people of diverse social and cultural worlds. Therefore, the approach allows for the intersection of culture and development in the study of moral reasoning.

While cultural and cross-cultural psychology have paved the way for including culture in the study of human development, recent decades have seen an increasing awareness of the need for indigenous explorations where psychological theories, models and epistemologies originate from worldviews of indigenous non-Western cultures and inform mainstream psychology (Bhawuk, 2010, 2011; Shweder, 2000; Greenfield, 2000).

This thrust for indigenous psychology also comes from the reality of a rapidly globalizing world, and multiculturalism becoming common in many parts of the world. International migration, the increasing use of social media platforms, and the exchanges between culturally diverse people of all ages through participation in a multitude of contexts (workplace, tourism,

schools) has become increasingly common. As different cultural worlds interact, there is an urgent need to focus attention on understanding diverse worldviews that guide different ways of thinking, behaving and believing. Research on how the Indian moral worldview guides moral reasoning and development is still germinating, with more theoretical frameworks available than empirical studies supporting them.

The aims of the present research project were twofold: (1) To quantitatively test hypotheses based on the cultural-developmental approach among children and adolescents in India, and to use qualitative data to provide insight into the nature of moral reasoning as well as their use of notable indigenous concepts, and (2) to use a qualitative, emic approach to understand moral concepts and reasoning among Indian adults from an indigenous perspective.

We start with a review of the cultural-developmental approach. This is followed by descriptions of the Indian context, the role of social class and morality, and the Indian moral worldview.

The Cultural-Developmental Approach

Culture and development are intrinsically related and need to be studied in tandem in developmental studies. Based on a synthesis of findings from different research traditions, the cultural-developmental approach lays out developmental trajectories for the three Ethics of Autonomy, Community, and Divinity (Jensen, 2008, 2015). These trajectories are flexible rather than fixed because, as explained below, they are conceptualized as "templates" that accommodate cultural differences.

The three ethics involve different, albeit not incompatible, conceptions of a person. Briefly, the Ethic of Autonomy involves a focus on persons as individuals. Therefore, specific types of moral reasons within this ethic include the well-being, interests and rights of individuals.

It also includes autonomy-oriented virtues such as self-expression, self-esteem, and independence. The Ethic of Community envisions persons as a member of social groups, such as family and society. Here moral reasons include duty to others, and concern with the welfare, interests, and customs of groups. Thus, self-moderation, respect and loyalty towards the group are important virtues within this ethic. The Ethic of Divinity focuses on persons as spiritual or religious beings. It includes moral reasons that pertain to divine and natural law, lessons in sacred texts, and the goal of spiritual purity, and virtues such as faithfulness, humility, and devotion (of religious or spiritual nature) (Jensen, 1995; Shweder, 1990).

The cultural-development approach allows for the analysis of moral development in terms of both, the degree of use of the ethics (quantitative change) over the life course and the specific types of moral concepts used within each ethic. Within the Ethic of Community, for example, reasoning in terms of one's duty to others is qualitatively different from reasoning in terms of one's desire to avoid social sanctions (see Appendix A for the coding manual). Figure 1 shows the developmental template for degree of use of each ethic (Jensen, 2008, p. 290).

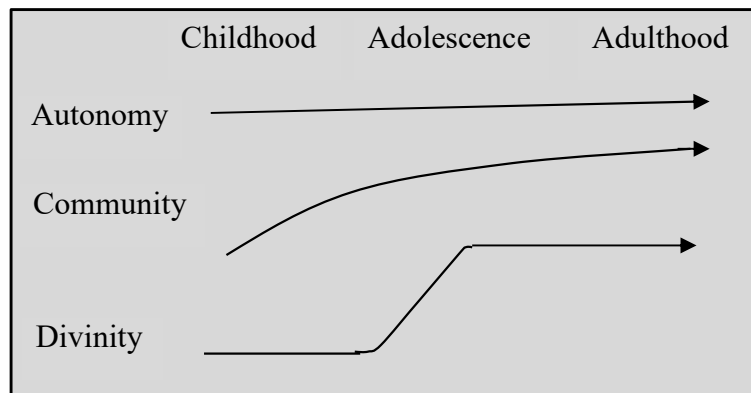**Research Using the Big Three Ethics Framework across Cultures**

Research has shown the presence of the three ethics in persons of different ages from a wide variety of cultures, including Brazil, Finland, Germany, India, Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, and the United States (Arnett et al., 2001; Bhangaokar & Kapadia, 2009; DiBianca Fasoli, 2018; McKenzie, 2019; Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2015; Schwarz et al., 2020; Vainio, 2003; Vasquez et al., 2001). Research has also demonstrated the utility of the three ethics in examining differences in moral reasoning in groups within countries, including groups of different socio-economic and religious backgrounds (Haidt et al., 1993; Jensen & McKenzie, 2016). Additionally, surveys have confirmed that moral reasons provided by a nationally

representative sample of American adults (Padilla-Walker & Jensen, 2015), and by convenience samples of different ages in countries such as Brazil, Israel, Japan, Macedonia, New Zealand, Spain, the United Kingdom, and the United States differentiate into factors that fit the three ethics (Guerra & Giner-Sorolla, 2010, 2015; Guerra et al., 2012; Schwarz et al., 2020).

As depicted in Figure 1, the cultural-developmental proposal is that the Ethic of Autonomy emerges early in life and remains relatively stable across adolescence and adulthood. However, the specific types of autonomy reasons used are likely to change with age.

Figure 1

The Cultural-Developmental Template of Moral Reasoning

Note. Each of the lines shows developmental patterns across the life span, from childhood to adulthood. The positions of the lines do *not* indicate their relative frequency in relation to one another (e.g., use of Autonomy being more frequent than use of Community and Divinity). (This is also the case for subsequent figures).

Longstanding lines of research show that children from across cultures speak about harm to the self and interests of the self (Colby et al., 1983; Turiel, 2002), as well as the needs and interests of other individuals (Carlo, 2006; Miller, 1994; Thompson, 2012). As children grow into adolescence and adulthood, they continue to reason in terms of the well-being of the self and other individuals (Eisenberg et al., 1995; Jensen, 1995; Vasquez et al. 2001; Walker et al., 1995; Zimba, 1994). They may also use other autonomy-oriented concepts in their moral reasoning

more frequently as they become older. For example, research suggests that American adolescents and adults are more likely than children to reason about individual rights and equity (Killen, 2002; Walker, 1989). While these concepts may not prevail across cultures, research has indicated that adolescents and adults in cultures such as India and Zambia give consideration to equity and justice (Miller & Luthar, 1989; Zimba, 1994).

The Ethic of Community, according to the cultural-developmental approach, increases with age both in degree of usage and the diversity of types of reasons. Developmental and cultural research shows that young children talk about community concepts related to family (Miller et al., 1990, 2011; Olson & Spelke, 2008; Shweder et al., 1990). By late childhood and adolescence, community concepts related to non-familial groups such as friends and work colleagues are added (Carlo, 2006; Chen, 2011; Rubin et al., 2013; Schlegel, 2011). Recent research has also shown that children in India, unlike the United States, experience a variety of social expectations as an inherent part of the self (Goyal et al., 2019). Longitudinal research in the United States has shown that older adolescents and adults also reason with reference to society as a whole (e.g., Eisenberg et al., 1995). While moral reasoning has been studied longitudinally in Europe and North America, longitudinal examinations of moral reasoning remain unexplored in India.

The Ethic of Divinity remains insufficiently studied in moral psychology. In cultures that emphasize scriptural authority or where people conceive of supernatural entities (e.g., God) as largely distinct from humans (e.g., omniscient and omnipotent), the cultural-developmental approach proposes that the Ethic of Divinity will be low among children and will then rise in adolescence to become similar to adult use of this ethic (Jensen, 2008). One reason is that in such religious cultures, the concepts pertaining to supernatural entities are of such an abstract nature

that they may be readily translated into moral reasoning only by adolescents whose cognitive skills allow for more abstraction than those of younger children. In sum, the cultural-developmental approach provides developmental templates that need to be merged with knowledge of a culture in order to generate reasonably precise hypotheses.

Research on Morality and the Big Three Ethics in India

Research has shown that Indian adults often invoke both autonomy and community considerations in response to moral issues. A questionnaire study with Indian college students found that they overwhelmingly preferred solutions to moral dilemmas that blended individual and collective considerations (87%), as compared to solutions that focused solely on individual (12%) or collectivistic (1%) considerations (Sinha & Tripathi, 1994). Also, Panda (2013) examined the usage of *madhyam mārg* in Indian adults' understanding of "critical incidents" in their lives, as well as the usage of the concept in scriptural and folk narratives. *Madhyam mārg* may be translated into English as finding a middle path when faced with a dilemma. Panda's analysis indicates that Indian adults and traditional narratives aim for the development of a *madhyam mārg* consciousness that balances goals of the individual and the collective.

Several cross-cultural studies have found that Indian adults, like adults in the United Kingdom and the United States, regard transgressions pertaining to justice and individual rights as moral. Indian participants, however, were significantly more likely to regard violations pertaining to interpersonal relationships, responsibilities to others, and social hierarchy as moral (Laham et al., 2010; Miller et al., 1990; Miller & Luthar, 1989).

A recent interview study that included both adolescents and adults, however, suggests that there may be age differences. While Indian adults responded to moral dilemmas by expressing equal concern for the pursuit of personal goals and role-related responsibilities,

adolescents invoked autonomy-oriented considerations more than community-oriented ones (Kapadia & Bhangaokar, 2015). Ethics of Autonomy and Community, then, seem readily present in Indian society, and it may be that adulthood is when the Ethic of Community reaches equal prominence with the Ethic of Autonomy.

Furthermore, the original template (Figure 1) depicted the development of the Ethic of Divinity in cultures that largely conceptualize supernatural entities in abstract ways and as distinct from humans. In long-standing Indian religious and philosophical traditions, however, the material and the spiritual are relatively merged, as compared to Western traditions (Paranjpe, 2013; Rao & Paranjpe, 2016). For example, *dharma*, has been a central organizing concept in Indian society for several millennia and continues to have present-day salience (Bhangaokar & Kapadia, 2009; Bhatia, 2000; Chatterjee, 1995; Chaudhary et al., 2021; Saraswathi et al., 2011). As a central lifegoal in the Hindu worldview, *dharma* also integrates the material and the immaterial in that it involves a balanced pursuit of material prosperity (*artha*), pleasure (*kāma*), and spiritual liberation (*moksha*).

Tripathi and Ghildyal (2013) have also argued that many practices in Indian society reflect the idea that divinity is an immanent part of nature, persons, and relationships. This is reflected in the many ways that religiosity coalesces with everyday activities (Bhangaokar, 2020; Misra & Gergen, 1993). Religious devotion commonly finds expression in tangible activities, such as feeding, bathing, and dressing the Gods. There are many places within and outside the home for worship, including household shrines, temples, and roadside shrines. Natural phenomena, such as trees, are sometimes shrines or places viewed as having holy qualities. There are also a variety of persons seen to have God-like status or special connections with the Gods, including gurus, *sādhus* (renouncers), and temple priests. Thus, Indian children may

reason about moral issues in terms of divinity concepts from early on, including in middle childhood, because these concepts are tied repeatedly to everyday phenomena (Jensen, 2008, 2011; Pandya & Bhangaokar, 2015; Saraswathi et al., 2011; Shweder et al., 1990).

Overall, the available research suggests that all three Ethics of Autonomy, Community, and Divinity are prevalent in India.

Social Class and Moral Reasoning

Research across countries indicates that views of the self as autonomous rise with socioeconomic development (Santos et al., 2017). With respect to use of the three ethics, research in Thailand found that high-SES urban adolescents used the Ethic of Autonomy more than low-SES rural adolescents, whereas the low-SES adolescents used the Ethic of Community more than their high-SES age-mates (McKenzie, 2018). Similarly, in a study in Brazil, high-SES adults reasoned more in terms of Autonomy and less in terms of Community than low-SES adults (Haidt et al. 1993). These findings indicate that the role of social class on the development of the three ethics merits closer examination.

In India, research on the relation of social class to children's moral reasoning is rare, and studies with low-SES children are virtually non-existent. However, the social reality of poverty and deprivation has a powerful influence on development (Misra & Mohanty, 2000). The daily lives of low-SES and high-SES Indian children, however, are very different in ways that seem likely to influence their moral reasoning. In a naturalistic study, Chadha and Misra (2006) examined prosocial reasoning and behavior among children (5-14 years), from high- and low-SES families. Results suggested that children's prosocial reasoning was characterized primarily by authority/punishment orientation, a concern for others' needs, pragmatism, mutual gain orientation, and orientation to honoring requests made. Participants' reasoning about others'

physical needs and honoring requests made, increased with age. Results also show significant SES differences, where children belonging to the low SES showed greater frequency of spontaneous as well as requested prosocial acts compared to their high SES counterparts. Children in the low SES used prosocial behaviors nearly four times more than children in the high SES, suggesting that their low-SES context gave greater opportunities for prosocial behavior.

A study focusing on parenting found that low-SES Indian families were more likely than high-SES families to emphasize benevolence, whereas high-SES families were more likely to value truthfulness (Srivastava et al., 1996, as cited in Misra & Mohanty, 2000). Observations of children's behaviors in school have also established that low-SES children were more cooperative and less competitive, compared to high-SES children (Pal et al., 1989; Srivastava & Lalnunmawi, 1989, as cited in Misra & Mohanty, 2000).

Lastly, as suggested by Misra (1991), even with the diversity in contexts and the various layers that exist in the Indian social fabric, the core of socialization in families continues to emphasize social relationships and embeddedness of an individual within their social milieu. Early childcare practices provide important contexts for socialization and therefore, for cultural worldviews to develop. Chaudhary et al. (2021) show how social conventions and moral obligations are intrinsic features of the Indian familial system in rural as well as urban India. They explain that child care continues to be a shared activity, where grandparents, siblings, visiting kin, and neighbors are all considered caregivers and members of the family irrespective of caste and class divides. Even with the recent COVID pandemic, lockdown and work-from-home circumstances, family bonds and relationships have been strengthened. Cultural diversity

in socialization practices stem from diversity in worldviews and guide aspects of human development, including moral development.

Worldviews

Worldviews are shaped by culture and determine who we are and how we understand the world around us (Bhawuk, 2011). They guide our values, behavior as well as cognition (Nisbett et al, 2001; Varnum et al, 2010). Worldviews maybe defined as a set of beliefs and assumptions about the world or the universe. They are a part of one's consciousness and offer an interpretive lens to understand reality and our existence within it. Hart (2010, p. 2) defines worldviews as "cognitive, perceptual, and affective maps that people continuously use to make sense of the social landscape and to find their ways to whatever goals they seek. They are developed throughout a person's lifetime through socialization and social interaction. They are encompassing and pervasive in adherence and influence." Koltko-Rivera (2004, p. 4) defines a worldviews as: "…a way of describing the universe and life within it, both in terms of what is and what ought to be. A given worldview is a set of beliefs that includes limiting statements and assumptions regarding what exists and what does not (either in actuality, or in principle), what objects or experiences are good or bad, and what objectives, behaviors, and relationships are desirable or undesirable. A worldview defines what can be known or done in the world, and how it can be known or done. In addition to defining what goals can be sought in life, a worldview defines what goals should be pursued. Worldviews include assumptions that may be unproven, and even unprovable, but these assumptions are superordinate, in that they provide the epistemic and ontological foundations for other beliefs within a belief system."

Worldviews include: (1) Existential beliefs- worldview statements that describe what exists and what does not, for example, 'Does God exists?' or 'Is there something like freewill?',

(2) Evaluative beliefs- worldview statements that describe human beings or actions in evaluative terms, for example, 'Are all humans basically good or bad?', and (3) Prescriptive/Proscriptive beliefs- worldview statements that judge the means and ends of actions as desirable or undesirable, for example, 'The pursuit of truth leads to happiness.'

The discipline of developmental psychology has for long been dominated by the culture of science developed primarily by Western theorists and researchers. Not surprisingly then, the traditional scientific approach is rooted primarily in the Western worldview and ideology (Chaudhary & Sriram, 2020; Henrich et al., 2010) that promotes an obsessive quest for a single, measurable, and value-free truth or reality—for example, the Newtonian worldview, where a research problem or concept is divisible into many parts, and the study of these parts informs us about the complex whole.

Indigenous worldviews are vastly different from these dominant Euro-American worldviews. For example, there is a certain comfort with dualities in the Indian logic system. For example, Bhawuk (2011) explains that while the Western logic system is unable to accept both X and 'not-X' as true, the Indian logic system comfortably accommodates the simultaneous use of X and 'not-X', where X plus 'not-X' will not be equal to zero but instead, becomes infinity. He explains that according to the classical Indian worldview in the *Upanishads*, it is often the opposites- that constitute the human mind and experience. For example, pain and pleasure, birth and death, construction and destruction are all seen as inherent parts of existence. There are more examples of this way of thinking. In the *Bhagwad Gitā*, for instance, both *pravritti* (engagement) and *nivritti* (disengagement) represent the inherent aspects of every single action (Turci, 2015). Additionally, the essence of *moksha* (spiritual liberation) is to overcome all dependence and

become free. However, to attain *moksha,* an individual must perform obligatory duties towards those who depend on them.

There are also immense possibilities for working at different levels between these polarities, depending on the circumstantial need and personal nature. For example, there can be several different means to a certain end, unlike in Western psychology where means and ends ought to correspond. Exclusive binary distinctions are therefore redundant in Indian thought. It is not surprising then, that the Indian worldview emphasizes the importance of maintaining a balance, regulation or aiming for the *madhyam mārg* (middle path) to live a harmonious, meaningful life. Functioning between polarities and maintaining homeostasis through the practice of equanimity is central to the Indian worldview.

Such a worldview poses a challenge to the Western mind, in that the Indian way of thinking and reasoning may seem convoluted, contradicting, and at best, confusing (Ramanujan, 1990). However, indigenous perspectives are important for three major reasons (if not more): in the absence of indigenous worldviews, Euro-American "universals" become applicable by default, human development is then studied a-culturally, devoid of context and culture, and this hinders the holistic conceptualization and theorizing of any developmental phenomena and does disservice to the discipline.

Speaking of research paradigms, Bhawuk (2011) explains how a researcher's worldview directs the choice of research problems, questions, and models. He highlights how even cross-cultural researchers run the risk of studying concepts that are only interesting from their own cultural perspective. While more researchers are actively acknowledging the importance of cultural knowledge, very few are embracing indigenous research paradigms in their research pursuits. Hart (2010) explains that the academic fraternity needs to ensure that research is not

only respectful of culture and be culturally sensitive but should be based on problems, approaches and processes that are grounded in diverse indigenous knowledge.

Harkness and Super (2020) warn us of a similar threat of being influenced by etic measures that fail to capture local cultural meanings. They explain, that while there is increased awareness of cultural variability, a major contemporary challenge is to train new researchers to incorporate knowledge from their own indigenous cultures rather than making them mere representatives of Western theory and psychology. Therefore, human diversity warrants a look at multiple indigenous perspectives to help strengthen global developmental science and create more sophisticated theories and interventions for families and societies (Raeff, et al., 2020; Harkness & Super, 2021, Thalmayer et al., 2021).

Selfhood is central to moral worldviews, and the conceptualization of the self is organically linked to socio-cultural contexts, indigenous perspectives of socialization, and therefore, to cultural worldviews held by people (Saraswathi, 2005). It is safe then to say, that moral reasoning is best understood in the context of indigenous worldviews endorsed by culture and socialization; and by theoretical frameworks that support the expression of indigenous moral concepts. The subsequent section describes the Indian moral worldview.

The Indian Moral Worldview: Elements of *Dharma*, *Karma* and *Moksha*

India is a diverse society that encompasses many different concepts in its moral worldview (Paranjpe, 2013). The Indian moral worldview is based on the concept of *dharma* as the universal moral order. While *dharma* is a concept that has multiple interpretations and cannot easily be translated into English, it is an important element of the Hindu worldview that constitutes the social, moral and natural order that ought to be maintained by relinquishing selfish desires and embracing individual responsibility (Bilimoria, 2013, p. 3). Therefore,

dharma guides relationships, obligations, and actions towards others as a means of balancing between personal, social and the natural order. In essence, *dharma* is understood as one's inner moral nature, and the performance of righteous duties in view of one's station in life (Mascolo et al., 2004). However, it has a variety of connotations and is very context-sensitive (Paranjpe, 2013; Ramanujan, 1990). There are no absolute claims or rules to abide by; instead one's deeds are judged as "good" or "bad" based on social roles, duties, as well as one's circumstances. For example, *dharma* can be described as *Āśramadharma* (duties based on the stage of life), *svadharma* (righteous conduct related to one's caste or class), and *appadharma* (conduct during abnormal times, such as times of distress or emergency) (Kakar, 1981; Ramanujan, 1990; Saraswathi et al., 2011). While *dharma* seems like an overarching, abstract idea, it is in fact, very context-specific and blended with everyday life due to the broad spectrum of applications it can entail. For example, Hinduism also insists on upholding *dharma* towards nature and all forms of life, so much so that it evolved the concept of *vasudhaiva kutumbakam*, i.e. the belief that all that is alive, from plants and animals to human species, belongs to a single family. For example, as Vasudev (1994) explains, *ahimsā* or the principle of non-violence takes root from this deep sense of obligation and respect for the larger cosmos, of which all human and non-human life forms are an integral part. It includes a moral obligation towards fellow humans and other forms of life and therefore, has practical implications on one's moral thought and behavior towards the general other. This emphasis on a relational self, makes one's *karma* or actions in human life as important as one's *dharma*; and both together lead to the path of *moksha* or spiritual liberation, and the realization of the *ātman* or one's true self (Bhangaokar & Kapadia, 2009; Saraswathi, 2005).

Karma refers to a one's actions, thoughts, feelings and intentions. It is intelligent, moral action within the framework of *dharma*. It is also understood as a moral order in which events take place for ethical reasons and in the long run, sins are punished and righteous conduct is rewarded (Huebner & Garrod, 1991; Paranjpe, 2013; Shweder et al., 1990). Thus, all actions have natural consequences. Additionally, one's *karma* in the present life also has consequences for one's life in future births. Thus, individuals are guided by their past *karma* and they also continue to actively shape their present as well as future *karma* based on their righteous practice of *dharma*. Therefore, *karma* is commonly understood as the law of causality, where your actions have a reciprocal effect. Mulla and Krishnan (2014) offer the *Karma Yoga* theory as an Indian theory of moral development. Based on a survey study involving 459 adult respondents from India, they explain how *Karma Yoga* presents itself as a technique of intelligent action. They give evidence for the three fundamental dimensions of *Karma Yoga*, namely (1) duty-orientation, (2) indifference to rewards, and (3) equanimity in relation to moral sensitivity, moral motivation and moral character. The authors highlight that *Karma Yoga* is rooted in Indian philosophical beliefs of the law of cause and effect (*karma*), the divinity of every being (*ātma*), and freedom from the cycle of birth and death (*moksha*). The ultimate goal of life, in the Indian worldview is to attain *moksha*, through the purification of the self, attained through good *karma*. Thus the observance of *dharma* through good *karma* and the pursuit of *moksha* comprise the central goals of human life in Hinduism.

Shraddhā or devotional reverence (Bhawuk, 2011) is also a key element in the Hindu moral worldview. Turci (2015) defines it as "the mind's serene asceticism toward *ātman* (the universal life-principle; the pervading principle in which everything exists…)" (p.1). *Shraddhā* is an aspect of spirituality (not religion) as it is common to all faiths. It is a key element in solving

moral dilemmas. Turci (2015) takes the example of the *Mahābhārata* to explain how different characters in the epic respond differently to ethical dilemmas because they act in accordance to their individual *shraddhā* or faith. He explains that when one chooses not to follow what the *ātman* indicates, one loses one's *shraddhā* and the ability to recognize one's *dharma*.

It is important to note that most values when understood from the Indian perspective, assert the inter-connectedness of spiritual, personal and social growth. Thus, the pursuit of spiritual wellbeing by fulfilling your *dharma* and doing good *karma* also benefit one's personal self and social self. The personal and the social selves are interdependent in India. Therefore, the Hindu way of life is neither individualistic nor collectivistic but an intersection of the two (Bhangaokar & Kapadia, 2009; Saraswathi et al., 2011; Sinha & Tripathi, 1994). According to Vasudev (1994), *karma*, as an integral part of the Hindu philosophy includes an emphasis on both social obligations towards others as well as ideas of rights and personal responsibility. Similarly, the path of *dharma* does not involve a division of the personal, social and spiritual duties. They are all fundamentally related. An in-depth understanding of moral reasoning in India offers scope to study the dynamic interactions of the three ethics, as they operate within the Indian moral worldview. Recent research supports this line of inquiry and asserts the need for examining the co-existence and interdependence of Autonomy, Community, and Divinity reasoning (Hickman & Dibianca Fasoli, 2015; Kapadia & Bhangaokar, 2015).

Rationale

The literature review presented above highlights the need to examine developmental trajectories for the three ethics of Autonomy, Community, and Divinity among Indian participants across the life span, as well as the types of moral concepts used in Indian moral reasoning. Additionally, contemporary literature also asserts the need for emic approaches that study indigenous moral worldviews with the aim of expanding the scope of morality.

The present study, therefore, uses the cultural-developmental approach to study moral reasoning among children, adolescents and adults in India. The approach allows for the intersection of culture and development in the study of moral reasoning. Additionally, it enables the use of both etic and emic approaches, depending on the choice of research design.

This dissertation project is organized in three parts. The first two studies were mixed methods studies that tested the cultural-developmental template hypothesis (Jensen, 2008, 2015). As depicted in Figure 2, Study 1 employed cross-sectional analysis to understand the use of the three ethics among children from high- and low- SES backgrounds. Since developmental change is best studied using longitudinal designs, longitudinal analyses was done as part of Study 2, where the same participants from high SES who participated in Study 1 formed the sample for study 2, following a time gap of approximately 4.5 years. Lastly, in response to the increasing need for indigenous, emic perspectives, Study 3 was conceptualized as a qualitative study with adult participants with the aim of examining the use of indigenous moral worldview and related concepts.

The following section contains details about research questions, hypotheses and method for each study.

Figure 2

Conceptual Framework of the Dissertation

	Cultural- Developmental and Emic Approach	
STUDY 1	**STUDY 2**	**STUDY 3**
Cross Sectional Design	Longitudinal Design	Qualitative Design
Children (8-12 years)	Adolescents (12-16 years)	Adults (35-45 years)
N=144	N=72	N=30
High and Low SES	High SES	High SES
Hypothetical Moral Dilemmas		Moral Worldviews

4.5 years