Moral Universals, Ancient Culture and Indian Youth:
Part I -Theoretical Foundations

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India is known for her rich, ancient culture and tradition. Based on R. A. Shweder's cultural psychology, Moral Foundations Theory poses that the Moral Foundations of "Harm/care" and of "Fairness/reciprocity" emphasize individual rights, as being characteristic of Western respondents. African and Asian participants, in contrast, additionally endorse the Foundations of "Ingroup/loyalty" and "Authority/respect". The Indian culture is presented as an outstanding example of the Moral Foundation of "Purity/sanctity", thus, placing high value on the sacredness of humans and animals, and emphasizing eating taboos in order to avoid spiritual pollution. Although many Asian cultures still orient by these cultural values, probably as a result of westernization, empirical tests by Jesse Graham on the basis of an online survey only found small differences between Asian and Western respondents. In Part-I we present additional evidence of theoretical nature from evolutionary viewpoint. The Part-II of this paper review studies on westernization in India and recommends that Indian youth, while accepting the challenge of westernization, should remain aware of their unprecedented cultural and spiritual heritage. Theoretical arguments and empirical findings point to the importance of cultural identity in order to preserve self-esteem, well-being, and coping resources.

Keywords: Cultural psychology, Moral Foundations Theory, multilevel selection, intuition, reasoning.

Some psychologists argue that mainstream psychology almost exclusively focussed on the study of White middle-class Americans and Europeans, expecting that uniform laws would govern humankind's behaviour, emotions, and ethical concepts (Kitayama & Cohen, 2007). In this pursuit, perhaps, the role of culture in the development of mind was overlooked. An even more contesting issue raised by the proponents of cultural psychology pertains to the assumption of a universal "mind" that is common to all cultures in the world as opposed to culturally specific "mentalities", reflecting the peculiarities of each culture (Shweder, 2000; Shweder, Much, Mahapatra & Park, 2003; Shweder, Haidt, Horton, & Joseph, 2008). These issues have also been raised within the mainstream psychology (e.g. Gergen, 2001; Bloom, 2012) and in cross-cultural psychology (Allwood & Berry, 2006). Alternatively, we would like to stress that culture is not only a medium for blossoming of innate universal

programmes, but provides access to acquired survival strategies for individuals and groups. It is for psychologists in general, and especially for those engaged in work on a particular community, to discover and highlight culture specific mentalities. This endeavour is likely to enlarge the scope of mainstream psychology, on the one hand, and indigenous psychologies or cultural psychology will in turn benefit from a rich heritage of methods and theories in mainstream psychology, on the other (Gergen, 2001; Paranjpe, 1985). Additionally, such kind of intercultural dialogue would facilitate the role of psychology in the era of globalization which has rapidly and enormously enlarged the limited space and knowledge of individuals and groups in the traditional societies (Kazdin, 2009). For psychologists, it is a challenge to facilitate the process of integration of younger generation into the global world. One way to achieve this is to enrich our understanding on basic human nature

and derive some universal moral values to bridge the gap among minds. Theoretical developments in the evolutionary origins of human species, biological, cultural and co-evolutionary, especially about cooperation, help, and altruism, provide a new look on human condition (Crook, 2009; Bloom, 2012). Our views about the divisive role of religion and human beings merely as carriers of selfish genes are giving way to co-evolutionary models where mutual trust thrives, as institutions develop moral traditions to reward and punish individuals in complex ways (Norenzayan & Shariff, 2008; Wilson, 2012).

Back in the 19th century, the German sociologist and philosopher, Toennies, differentiated between a group-oriented way of life, characterized by mutual dependence and preparedness to stand in for each other *(Gemeinschaft* or community), and a person-oriented one which emphasizes individual rights, rules, and regulations *(Gesellschaft* or society) (Toennies, 1887). This thinking is perhaps more widespread. For example, Sikh communities maintain a strong group solidarity, a quality that mirrors the concept of *asabiyah* of the Arab-Muslim scholar Khaldun who lived in Cairo, just 50 years before Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism. *Asabiyah* arises naturally in groups of common ancestry and expands in groups having social ties, a dynamic of mind and matter reinforced by spiritual factors, fostering and reflecting cohesion within a group (Gierer, 2001). Khaldun's *asabiyah* has largely escaped the notice of scholars on Sikhism (see Kapur & Misra, 2011) who have alternately conceptualized the origin of a Sikh heroic self in powerful symbolism and moral codes. In the evolutionary science, individual selection and group selection debate has a long history. However, the idea that individual selection is a main factor in evolution popularized a view of human nature which is selfish. Individuals working for the good of groups are likely to be invaded by selfish individuals. An alternative model of group selection by Wynne-Edwards (1986) initiated a viogorous debate that cooperation, help and altruism are independent factors that bind members of a group, and in a group, various social mechanisms keep check on selfish individuals. Further developments on this more fundamental

pathway of evolution, now named as multilevel selection (Wilson & Wilson, 2008), has significance in three ways (for more discussion, see Wilson, 2012; Bloom, 2012)—cooperation as an independent factor in evolution along with competition, religion and culture as major catalysts in both factors as well as increasing complexity of social systems, and human condition to be reviewed with this new look in collaboration with ideas of positive psychologists.

Psychologists studying different cultures, perhaps away from this evolutionary debate, also postulated individualist and collectivist tendencies. Hofstede (1983), after examining work-related values among employees of IBM worldwide, conceptualized typically Western values as "individualist" as opposed to "collectivist" ones which he found to prevail for example in Asia, Africa, and South America (cf., Triandis, 1995). Along similar lines, Markus and Kitayama (1991) conceptualized dependent vs. independent modes of self construals, the former being characteristic of Eastern and Southern, the latter of Western parts of the world (cf. also Kitayama, Duffy & Uchida, 2007–for a more recent version of the theory).

This approach has been multiplied in numerous studies; however, it has received severe criticism, especially from researches on eastern cultures (Ghosh, 2012; Sinha & Tripathi, 2002; Voronov & Singer, 2002), emphasizing that individualist/collectivist tendencies can develop independently in the same individual. Another controversial dimension in this approach is associating the individual with achievement and competition. A positive association between individualistic orientation and nAch was characteristic of Western cultures, whereas collectivists were low in nAch, which was further associated with low output in organizations. Studies on Indian participants have shown that these behaviours are highly contextual and they are not characteristic of individuals from eastern cultures (see Misra & Gergen, 2002)

Shweder's Cultural Psychology and Moral Foundations Theory (MFT)

In cultural psychology, Shweder's (2000) approach took a more complex view by postulating

that morality, emotions, and their somatic correlates vary as a function of culture and as a consequence of three universal moral principles which are represented to different degrees, namely (1) the Ethics of Autonomy, (2) the Ethics of Community, and (3) the Ethics of Divinity.

The **Ethics of Autonomy** is characteristic of most middle-class US Americans and Europeans. It emphasizes values such as freedom, independence, and individual well-being, and poses that any action not infringing on others' rights is morally acceptable. For example, a person's eating behaviour or the way he or she uses to dress is considered to be private affairs. Similarly, disgusting or disrespectful actions are not subject to moral judgment, as long as they do not imply objective damage.

On the other hand, the Ethics of Autonomy in some respect resembles Individualism; conversely, according to Shweder (2000), the **Ethics of Community** is characteristic of Asia, Africa, and South America, and resembles some aspects of Collectivism by emphasizing values pertaining to controlling one's emotions and by behaving in a loyal, decent, and respectful way. Violations of the rules of hierarchy are considered most severe moral transgressions and observing eating and dressing codes is important in order to preserve the in-group's well-being, dignity, and soundness.

The third ethic put forward by Shweder (2000) is the **Ethics of Divinity,** pertaining to spiritual and religious duties. According to this ethic, humans as well as animals incorporate divine elements, which must not be vitiated by acting disrespectfully. Thus, for example eating behaviour is highly formalized, implying that disgusting acts or breaking taboos would cause spiritual pollution.

It is important to emphasize that Shweder's (2000) three ethics should not be applied to certain cultures categorically, but rather are endorsed by individuals from various cultural backgrounds to different degrees. Although, for example, Indian culture predisposes people to score higher on the Ethics of Community and Divinity, as compared to a White middle-class average citizen of Berlin

or New York, in each individual case endorsement of the three ethics will vary. Highly religious White middle-class Americans, for example, as opposed to atheist ones, may score even higher on the Ethics of Divinity than westernized Asian or African respondents may do (for details, cf., Jensen, 2008). An individual's endorsement of the three ethics can be measured by a questionnaire recently developed by Jensen and Padilla-Walker (2012).

To summarize, there is now evidence that ethics of Autonomy, Community, and Divinity have universal roots in human condition. A cultural developmental study by Jensen (2011) suggests that ethics of Autonomy and Community emerge early in life and continue across lifespan, the Ethics of Divinity emerge in adolescence.

Along similar lines, Haidt and Graham (2007) and Haidt and Joseph (2004) developed their Moral Foundations Theory (MFT) which postulated five basic ethical concepts, namely

"1. Harm/care: Concerns for the suffering of others, including virtues of caring and compassion.

2. Fairness/reciprocity: Concerns about unfair treatment, cheating, and more abstract notions of justice and rights.

3. Ingroup/loyalty: Concerns related to obligations of group membership, such as loyalty, self-sacrifice, and vigilance against betrayal.

4. Authority/respect: Concerns related to social order and the obligations of hierarchical relationships, such as obedience, respect, and the fulfillment of role-based duties.

5. Purity/sanctity: Concerns about physical and spiritual contagion, including virtues of chastity, wholesomeness, and control of desires." (Haidt & Kesebir, 2010, p. 822).

Each one of these five psychological foundations has a separate evolutionary origin, and they serve as blueprints for building human moral communities (Haidt, 2007), This radical assumption has a forerunner in Gadgil's work on the ecological organization of Indian society in general (see Gadgil, 1991 for a summary), and more specifically on the integration of moral and

religious belief systems in prescientific societies, where knowledge, practice, and beliefs co-evolve (Joshi & Gadgil, 1991; Gadgil, Berkes, & Fiske, 1993). This work has further significance in relation to Haidt's (2007) quest for research on sense of sacredness (Foundation 5 Purity/sanctity).

According to MFT (Haidt & Joseph, 2004; Haidt & Kesebir, 2010), Foundations 1 and 2 may be expected to be related to the Ethics of Autonomy, being typical of Western middle-class respondents. The Ethics of Community additionally encompasses Foundations 3 and 4, and finally, the Ethics of Divinity is expected to encompass the entirety of Moral Foundations 1 through 5, being characteristic of Asian and African cultures. The Moral Foundations Questionnaire (MFQ, Graham, Haidt & Nosek, 2009) has been developed as a measure for the five foundations on the basis of (1) *judgment* and (2) *perceived relevance* of moral issues. Graham et al. (2011) presented evidence confirming the MFQ's convergent, discriminant, and predictive validity and also presented results from confirmatory factor analysis which supported hypothesized dimensions.

The themes of hierarchy and independence characterize the ethics of Community (Shweder et al. 2003). Group selection may have shaped human morality (Haidt, 2007); therefore, its roots are much deeper, and may be found in the evolution of cooperation in social animals. Thus, there is a likelihood of discrimination between in-groups and out-groups, and the importance of loyalty towards the former. In India, where evolutionary cousins of man live in human habitats and share a mythological relationship, as depicted in Hindu epic Ramayana, where Hanuman, the chief of monkeys, helps Rama in battles with the Ravana. Such relationships, on the one hand, support Shweder's thesis of the Ethic of Community, but also suggest evolution of ethics beyond in-groups, encompassing the other species. In fact, Pirta's work on cooperative behavior in monkeys was inspired by this man-monkey relationship. The research hypotheses were, however, developed on the work of Morton Deutsch in social psychology, the greater the positive cathexis (e.g. social grooming), the

positive inducibility (e.g. cooperative attack and defense), and the positive substitutability (e.g. division of labor and hierarchy) among members, the more cohesive the group (Pirta, 1990).

Shweder et al. (2003) hypothesize that emotions have linkages with the three moral ethics, which are, in turn modulated by the culture. They underlined that cultural psychology assumes that "act of meaning" takes place rapidly, automatically, and un-self-consciously. Haidt (2007) labeled it as the "intuitive primacy" principle. In essence, this is an issue about the cognitive mechanisms underlying the process of moral judgment. Intuitive moral judgments are fast whereas the moral judgments based on reasoning are slow. Two different models have been proposed. The Social Intuitionist Model of Haidt and associates places more emphasis on affective valance in making intuitive judgments (see Haidt, 2007), the dual-process morality theory of Greene and associates (see Greene, 2009) emphasizes that involvement of fast or slow cognitive process depends upon the nature of moral judgments. However, they agree in suggesting that moral judgment is rather more a matter of affective intuition than reasoning, for which underlying brain structures need exploration through neuroimaging (Greene & Haidt, 2002).

Strangely enough, in these studies which implicate two cognitive mechanisms, there is no mention of life-long research by Daniel Kahneman on two distinct cognitive processes, intuition (System 1) and reasoning (System 2), which was presented in the Nobel Prize Lecture in 2002 (Kahneman, 2003). He writes, the operations of System 1 are fast, automatic, effortless, associative and slow learning, on the one hand, and the operations of System 2 are slow, controlled, effortful, rule-governed, and flexible. He, in fact, noted that the operations of System 1 "*are often emotionally charged*" and used for making impressions, rather than rational judgments, in which operations of System 2 are mainly involved. Moreover, Kahneman provides a more elaborate framework in terms of accessibility, the ease with which particular mental contents come to mind, which is a joint function of stimuli and events as well as characteristics of

cognitive mechanisms (System 1 and System 2). In the present case, the former refers to cultural events and the latter are the neurological processes in the brain.

Curiously, different cultures have developed different ways of accessing these two systems. For example, intuitive mode, although easily accessible, is a way to access knowledge which is sacred (or assumed to come from a distant source or from higher state of consciousness). In the psychological foundations of mind laid down in the Indian tradition, especially by Sri Aurobindo, there is an elaborate method of accessing intuition (*pratibha*) (see Cornelissen, 2011). The practitioners of little and great traditions of the Hindus access important information through various trance states (intuitive mode) which has functional value in their culture or community. In the Sikh tradition, a concept "Dhur ki Bani" refers to accessing information from the Absolute (Pirta, 2013).

India as an Outstanding Example: On the path of Karma

In his quest to understand Indian society (see for summary Gadgil, 1991), a young Harvard trained biologist followed a distinct evolutionary approach which has significance for understanding the bases of moral behaviour, especially in the Indian context, where as many as 2,753 communities live in 32 states/Union territories. Gadgil's work on measuring cultural diversity, traits per community (the alpha-diversity), differences in traits between communities (the beta-diversity), and number of traits in a state (gamma-diversity), is unique (see Pirta, 2009). Gadgil's pioneer study on the sacred uses of nature is the most important for us in the present context of moral development, where he explored the Ghatmatha (the crest of Western Ghats) rich in sacred groves, patches of forest preserved in the name of deities. The vegetation in these sacred groves was rich and diverse; in contrast, the surrounding forests were in poor condition (Gadgil & Vartak, 1976). As more evidence came on sacred groves from all over the landscape of India, Gadgil's curiosity as an evolutionary biologist was aroused to explore the problem with greater depth, using models of reciprocal altruism and group selection in context

of the evolution of sacred cultural values. The argument was, although in prehistoric time biodiversity conservation practices were not the primary concern, the diversity of animal and plant life was however preserved in the idiom of religious beliefs and social conventions. In order to have prudent use of biomedical resources, it should be feasible to develop a model on evolutionary understanding of cooperation and altruism. The model of refugia (Joshi & Gadgil, 1991), on the line of sacred groves, is perhaps the first theoretical advance to implement biodiversity conservation in societies where there is an intimate relationship between knowledge, practice, and beliefs (Gadgil, Berkes, & Fiske, 1993). Gadgil has been able to pursue this approach even in framing policies of use of forest resources in India (see Planning Commission of India (Environment & Forest Division), 2011), a goal which positive psychology intends to achieve through establishing a relationship between happiness and sustainable development (O'Brien, 2012). But in essence, these theoretical pursuits have implications in founding moral psychology in cultural and biological evolution (Haidt, 2007), and particularly understanding the root of dissent among groups over issues leading to 'culture war' (Koleva et al., 2012).

According to social psychologists, individuals or selves are not completely independent from the cultural group of which they are part. The social identity or the self of an individual is the product of his/her experiences in a group. Perhaps there are certain factors—social and non-social—which set limits for the size of a group. Paranjpe (1985) assumes cognitive processes such as organization of knowledge in memory (the world is reconstituted by the individual) and a tendency of conservatism towards content and flow of information set limits and have self-preservative value. There is a tendency to value the belief system of own group over the beliefs of the other group. Paranjpe suggests that Eastern concept of self-realization has significance in overcoming this close-mindedness by continuous examination of selfhood, and may thus help in removing false, misguided images in our self.

Self provides a world-view to an individual but it is also a way of knowing the individual by others. Bhawuk (1999) explores the ambiguity in conceptualization of self as individualistic/ collectivistic, and on this basis, categorizing cultures into one or the other domains. He follows the Hindu world-view where self is surrounded by *maya*, which is an objective and socially constructed world. Self is in constant interaction with the world through desires, and one has to learn to deal with the desires to obtain harmony. India has a long history of tradition where various ways of controlling desires have been followed. Many of the masters who excel in this control over desires may fall in the category of creative geniuses, as they have developed distinct world-views about human condition. Bhawuk (2003) extends Triandis's framework on culture and ecology as determinants of human behaviour to develop a thesis that India has a rich spiritual tradition (culture) and landscape (history and ecology) to facilitate creativity.

The emphasis has now to shift from inculcating culture-specific to culturally universal values. Whether this transition would be easy or difficult for a youth in India is an important question. Since he/she grows up in an ancient culture that has accumulated its ingredients of moral values over a long period, the transition would be easier. This optimism has to be supplemented by acquiring more objective information about this issue and psychologists may act as facilitators of the transition of youth from an ancient to new world order. Additionally, as underlined by the pioneer of cultural approach in psychiatry (Carstairs & Kapur, 1976), we need to help those young men and women, first of all, who are yet too attached to their communities, and even culturally inherit identities of socially deprived groups (Kapur, 1994). To this, we may add a large population of internally displaced people, where youth are not able to develop their identities or they are distorted.

A broad project in this direction is likely to involve (see Gergen, 2001), (a) enriching of mainstream psychology by inputs from Indian psychology (Cornelissen, 2011), cultural psychology (e.g. Shweder et al. 2003), and critical cultural psychology (see Vahali, 2011); (b) enrichment of practice of psychology through multidisciplinary approach, where anthropology, psychiatry, cultural neuroscience and folk psychology meet. Eastern meditational techniques, identifying culture-bound syndromes and above all narratives of positive (e.g. Negi, 2013) and negative well-being (e.g. Vahali, 2009) of people has special value; and, (c) enrichment of methodology is another significant area. For example, mind and consciousness have been central to Indian psychological understanding; much of the insight on this concept has come through introspection and innovative ways of transcending to higher states of consciousness (Cornelissen, 2011). We need subjective and qualitative approaches, improvised during field work in cultural context, for example, Shweder's approach for understanding emotions, moral values and other aspects of Oriya community at Bhubaneswar, Orissa. We may learn from various indigenous psychologies and through their experiences in applying various methods (Allwood & Berry, 2006).

For inculcating moral values among children and youth, Haidt and Joseph (2004) have suggested that the innate moral schema can be triggered through stories and examples referring to virtues. The hypothesis is that virtues are social skills, and the goal of moral education should be to foster linkage between the innate intuitions and virtues. The script method uses this triggering approach, and has been applied to study human relationship with the God as a secure base following Bowlby's (1997) theory of attachment (Kumari & Pirta, 2009). Instead of modules, Bowlby used the idea of internal working models (IWMs) which are developed during interactions of the infant with the mother or care-giver. The youth need such moral prompting to foster moral values ingrained in its ancient culture, without such efforts, their understanding of Indian cultural values may remain at superficial level, a handicap rather an asset.

India poses a typical example of the Ethics of Divinity, frequently cited by R. A. Shweder, who had developed his theory after his visits to the then Indian state of Orissa (now Odisha). For

example, with respect to health related concepts and social relationships in India, Shweder (2008) cited an interview partner:

"There is nothing on the outside called God. God is within us. The human body is the only real sacred ground and it becomes de-sanctified after pollution. If your life-span is fifty years it will decrease if you allow your body to become polluted. But if you obey every duty and custom you will be free of pollution and you will be healthy" (p. 63).

With respect to the caste system, according to Shweder (2008), touching impure individuals or objects might infringe the divine law, whereas repentance can reestablish purity (Glasenapp, 1986). Similarly, Shweder (2000) pointed to violations of taboos related to purity and authority in India by giving the example of a man eating chicken or having his hair cut after his father had died the day before.

In general, Asian participants have been found to endorse community-related duties such as caring for friends and relatives, i.e., advocating the Moral Foundation of *Ingroup/Loyalty* (Janoff-Bulman & Leggatt, 2002; Laham, Chopra, Lalljee, & Parkinson, 2010; Lee, Cameron, Xu, Fu, & Board, 1997; Miller, 1994; Miller & Bersoff, 1992; Sachdeva, Singh & Medhin, 2011). They also were found to place high value on hierarchy (related to the Moral Foundation of *Authority/respect)* (Sachdeva et al., 2011). Honesty, charity, and hospitality are important concerns of Hindu religion; moreover, the importance of eating taboos as well as of religious ceremonies and taking care of the Brahmans and of sacred animals were emphasized for example by Basham (1981). He also pointed to "good thoughts" (p. 341) as a cognitive aspect of *Purity/sanctity,* encompassing patience and contentedness, being compassionate and, at the same time, refraining from being greedy or envious, considering that an individual's actions in present life will be compensated for in the course of his or her future forms of existence.

Hindus used to practice religious pluralism, and were also being open towards Christianity (von Glasenapp, 1986), holding that there are multiple forms of truth and conceding that belief in a personal God does not exclude believing in various deities and in a supreme divine principle. Accordingly, Vasquez, Keltner, Ebenbach and Banaszynski (2001) found morality to be far more balanced among Asian as compared to U.S. American respondents.

In summary, from the evidence cited, all five moral foundations of MFT may be expected to be emphasized by Indian culture. In fact, in a large online survey by Graham et al. (2011) respondents from South Asia, East Asia, and Southeast Asia achieved significantly higher scores on Ingroup/loyalty and Purity/sanctity than those from the USA, the UK or the European continent. Surprisingly, however, possibly as a result of westernization, only small effect sizes were achieved. Similarly, respondents from Asia expressed more concern for care/harm, fairness/reciprocity, and authority/respect than those from the West, but also in this case effect sizes were small.

Conclusion

In summary, it should be noted that westernization, bringing about both, risks and opportunities, can only be dealt with by future generations effectively by preserving their cultural identity while, at the same time being willing to accept the challenge of global modernity rather than retreating from it in a fundamentalist way. India's culture is insolubly linked to her religious tradition and similarly, on the individual level, a person's spirituality contributes to his or her self-concept, self-esteem, and well-being. Moreover, preserving cultural identity not only brings about continuing social support by one's family and relatives but also is an important prerequisite of establishing and developing personal identity.

Keeping this in mind, psychological care in India should adopt a comprehensive model of health as recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO), emphasizing "primary prevention", i.e., attempting to keep healthy people from falling ill by instigating an "integration" approach, which accepts the challenges of westernization and at the same time remains aware of the country's rich cultural heritage and

identity, placing special emphasis on the subcontinent's unprecedented spirituality, ethics, and morality.

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