DISCUSSION
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The results of the study are discussed from a cultural psychological perspective, elucidating how it facilitated the understanding of social-moral development in the Indian context. Emanating from the cultural psychology perspective, the self–other conceptualization in the Indian context is understood vis-à-vis the execution of duty/responsibility (kartavya) and the complementary co-existence of the ethics of autonomy and community. The mediating effects of gender and education on social-moral development are brought forth with special emphasis on cultural continuity and social change. Then, methodological aspects and the limitations of the study are reflected upon. Lastly, major conclusions and implications of the study are outlined along with future directions for research in the area.

The cultural psychology perspective was chosen for the present study as it provided a broader, more integrated theoretical structure which explained both, the processes of social-moral development as well as the interwoven and inseparable influences of culture and context. The cultural psychology perspective includes more than one interpretive framework to research a multifaceted area like social-moral development. It has scope to account for the rational, non-rational and even the irrational aspects of mental functioning, all of which may operate in differing proportions across cultures (for details see Shweder, 1984). This is especially relevant with regard to social-moral functioning. Understanding the cultural psychology perspective thus became a prerequisite ‘first step’ for the study. The challenge, however, was to differentiate it from other theoretical perspectives (cognitivist, emotivist, constructivist, developmentalist) and comprehend its basic principles. The interdisciplinary nature of the perspective enabled understanding research from a variety of disciplines, primarily anthropology, linguistics and developmental psychology.
The custom complexes derived from the present study depict how individuals operate within certain indigenous, cultural frames of reference. These are discussed in the subsequent sections.

Realizing the Self through Kartavya: The Co-existence of Autonomy and Community

Traditional Indian philosophical systems profess that the ultimate aim of human development should be to reach the level of self-actualization or the Atman-Brahman interface. Assuming that selfhood is not restricted to the physical body alone, most discussions about the self in India revolve around both spiritual and psycho-social aspects. According to the Taittiriya Upanishad, the human soul is encased in five sheaths consisting of matter, life, mind, reason and bliss. Morality operates in the fourth sheath of reason while Brahman is beyond reason and becomes the foundation of the fifth sheath, which is bliss (Mahadevan, 1967). An individual must scale these concentric layers for spiritual unity with the Brahman. All ideas of self and personhood in the Indian context are rooted in this philosophical baseline. The transmission of these philosophical ideas may take divergent forms but what remains constant is the guiding principle of moving towards moral and spiritual refinement through virtuous actions.

In the social world, an individual is expected to meander through many relationships and still achieve the spiritual goal of self-actualization. According to Trpargh (2001), to attain higher levels of consciousness, three defilements of raga (passion), dvesha (hatred) and moha (delusion) have to be kept in check. A seemingly tall order, many consider this to be a distant, unattainable goal and may never ponder too much about it. Then, in the true philosophical sense, a completely autonomous Indian self is only a spiritual entity or a transmigratory soul. Even the Bhagavad Geeta pronounces the
self as an indestructible entity which remains unaffected by worldly influences of every kind and urges individuals to realize its true nature (Chinmayananda, 2002). But how then does the Indian self survive without realizing itself in everyday life? How does it move towards self-refinement or moral purity, if this is the coveted cultural goal all must strive to achieve? What is virtuous action and how is it to be executed in the real world while dealing with real people?

Moral behavior in the Indian context is guided to a large extent by an all-encompassing frame of dharma. Dharma (moral order or righteous action) provides the necessary guidelines to achieve spiritual goals through the performance of right action even as individuals lead materialistic, worldly lives. The concept of dharma is largely understood as coherence in the Indian psyche (Marriott, 1990). Dharma prescribes worldly duties which are in accordance to one's stage and station of life. Caste and position in social hierarchy also influence the components of an individual's dharma (Chaturvedi, 2001). The understanding of kartavya (duty), as part of one's larger dharma (righteous action), is the quintessential moral explanation of personhood in the Hindu worldview. Colloquially, many times the two words, kartavya and dharma, are used interchangeably and refer to similar aspects of duty or responsibility. Dharma, the foundation of Indian morality and the inner moral nature of the self, finds expression in culturally appropriate behaviors of individuals (Miller, 1994, Mascolo et al, 2004). Even in the present study, the concept of kartavya mediated respondents' decisions and was an inseparable part of their mentalities. The concept of kartavya made the routine, cultural and familial practices seem morally intelligible. All respondents understood kartavya within the boundaries of specific social-familial roles like that of a parent, child, wife, husband and father-in-law. Gender also played an important part in defining these roles and explaining the duties.
(kartavya) befitting these roles. To a great extent continuity across generations was observed in the understanding of kartavya indicating that its transmission is tacit in nature. Besides familial roles, respondents considered themselves important members of the social structure due to which they envisioned some kartavya to ensure the smooth functioning of society. This was especially clear from the responses of men (or fathers) across caste groups. The concept of kartavya was hence broadened to include the larger social structure as well. This creates the necessary foreground to discuss the close association between ethics of autonomy (self) and community (self-in-society). As the ethics were derived from research on self-conceptualization (Shweder & Miller, 1985), it becomes necessary to reconsider the nature of the Indian self before discussing the co-existence of ethics as found in the present study.

As is widely known, the self in India is situated in a hierarchical web of social relationships. Roland (1988) denotes that the Indian self is a contextual ‘we’ self than an ‘I’ self. The highly contextual nature of the Indian self expresses itself through many social roles and finds its identity through the relationships it maintains with the larger group (family, caste, society). Unlike the western self which has fixed boundaries for the self and the group, the Indian self has variable boundaries and is situated within the group (Trnpathi, 2001). Comparing self-conceptualizations in India and the United States, Mascolo et al. (2004) advocate the model of an encompassing self in India, wherein the boundaries of the self are not blurred but the self is always embedded in relationships and subsumed by others. Like the roles, even the responsibilities represent hierarchy and asymmetry. Because of this trait, it is not surprising to find individuals identify with their roles in relation to others rather than only as autonomous units or persons. Within this cultural framework, a person
expresses his / her moral self in relation to others through the appropriate execution of kartavya, which is always in correspondence to one’s station and roles in life.

Thus, however, does not mean that individuals always have a relational understanding of themselves. The self is understood as a distinct entity but is situated among other selves to whom one is intricately associated. Any decision, which prioritizes self-goals over the fulfillment of corresponding duties, is considered ethically and culturally inappropriate. Such a person will not only run the risk of moving closer to moral-spiritual degradation, but will also be socially criticized. The ‘either me – or others’ model is not viable at all in Indian context because the Indian self finds it very difficult to justify the separation of the individual from the roles he/she is executing. This can be attributed to the moral implications of not fulfilling one’s kartavya / dharma. Thus any achievement of self-goals is morally justified only if the corresponding duties are taken care of. If the duties are not discounted in the process of achieving one’s personal goals, it is the best possible condition or state of mind.

Again, it is important to reiterate that in many cases, the duties are not prioritized over self-goals, but one tries to take on both challenges simultaneously, not one at the cost of another. An apt example is that of the son going to the city for a career along with the elderly father or after arranging for his care in the village. Only in cases where there are very limited choices or the dilemmas become tougher, processes of prioritization take place. This explains why a majority of respondents in the present study were keen to find the madhala rasta or a middle path and were successful in organizing their decisions around this principle. In this sense, the results converged with Mascolo et al’s (2004) model of the encompassing Indian self.

In the present study, most of the coded justifications denoted an intricate mix of the ethic of autonomy and the ethic of community. This was especially true of scenarios.
involving family issues. As all hypothetical scenarios pitted a personal wish or goal against the familial or cultural norms (inclusive of gender norms patterned by culture), there was scope to know if respondents prioritized one aspect over another. But this did not happen. Instead, a pattern of taking the middle path emerged which led to two sets of responses which were stated simultaneously. One of them could be coded distinctly under the ethics of autonomy and another for the ethic of community. As revealed in the results the use of the ethic of community was slightly more, but closely followed by the ethic of autonomy. The qualitative analysis resonates with an oft-repeated pattern of autonomy use paralleled with the use of the ethic of community. These responses clearly displayed ideas of an autonomous self which simultaneously emphasized the inseparable duty-bound aspects of the roles it played. In most cases, kartavya strongly intervened as a moral obligation which could not be separated from the self-conceptualization.

Intense and clear understandings of the self as an autonomous entity were found more among educated Brahmins, especially men and young adult girls. Careful analysis of responses indicated a clear use of autonomy inclusive of concepts of equality, rights and reciprocity. At the same time, respondents emphasized that duty and role-related obligations ran parallel to their understanding of personal rights. They asserted that they would prioritize obligations only if it was a ‘no-win’ situation.

Drawing analogies from the field of music and ayurveda (ancient Indian medicine) Sinha (2001), highlights the proclivity of the Indian psyche to avoid extremes and function in the ambiguous grey area, between opposites. Even in behavior, the emphasis is always on maintaining a balance and not disturbing the homeostasis of any system. The present study also found similar evidence. For all hypothetical scenarios, respondents displayed a tremendous capacity to avoid extremes and work...
out alternatives such that, as far as possible, no *kartavya* was compromised for exclusive, personal goals. This tendency to work out the middle path (*madhala rasta*) came across as the most preferred and appealing form of rationality. Although most scenarios posed two or more equally important *kartavya* in opposition to one another, respondents tried to avoid prioritization of one type of *kartavya* over others. For example, in the scenario about performing the Hindu death rites vs donating the body for medical research, respondents thought a middle path could be worked out by donating vital body organs (for the social cause) and then performing the death rites (culturally, spiritually expected). This indicates that with some discretion, both ends—taking care of the social cause and performing the death rites—could be achieved.

Aspects of divinity also influenced the nature of the self and *kartavya*. In the Hindu world view, a human birth is not only considered superior to other forms of life, it is also an indicator of one's past moral virtue (*karma*). By controlling one's *karma* (moral action), it is possible for a person to be born on a higher or lower plane, indicating the synonymy between birth and the intrinsic nature of a person (Chennakesavan and Reddy, 1997). Because of the great significance attached to the human form in the cycle of *samsara*-birth, death and rebirth—birth as a human birth bestows upon persons the responsibility (*kartavya*) of showing altruism, empathy and compassion towards other human beings or all living organisms. According to the *Bhagavad Geeta*, the human being is considered supreme among other living beings only because of the “rational capacities of his discriminative intellect” (Chummayananda, 2002, pp 128). In the present study, many respondents, Brahmins in particular, mentioned the value of human life in these terms while justifying their decision to help an injured stranger. Such responses were coded as virtues under the ethic of divinity. These responses represented a world view wherein various life forms...
are hierarchically ordered. By virtue of being at the apex, humans have the responsibility of maintaining the symbiosis in the system. Ideas of *ahimsa* (non-violence) also originate from this world view and find expression in the moral reasoning of many Indians (Vasudev, 1994). This explains why for Indians, social responsibilities at any plane (with family and with strangers) are considered mandatory and not optional. Without provision for the ethic of divinity within the moral realm, concepts such as the above, would remain uncovered or outside the moral realm.

In case of the scenario about helping an injured stranger on one's way to an important appointment, some *kartavya* were easily prioritized over others. In a majority of instances, *kartavya* to help an injured stranger was prioritized over *kartavya* at the workplace, even if there were negative consequences of doing so. Some ethical goals one prioritizes may be universal (saving life) but their understanding is definitely patterned by the cultural mores and religious worldviews (value to human life in the Hindu world view). Cross-cultural similarity may emerge in the kinds of responsibilities / duties which are perceived and prioritized but there should be scope to discover differences in the justifications underlying the decisions. These cannot be separated from their respective cultural ideologies. The strength of the cultural psychological perspective lies in unearthing these aspects. The perspective enables meaningful incorporation of such metaphysical concepts within psychological functioning. Systematic inquiry about the constituents, applications and local meanings of concepts like *kartavya* and *karma* can form a strong basis for making cross-cultural comparisons on the ideas of duty, filial piety and the like.

Belief in after-life and understanding the self as a transmigratory soul was evident when respondents discussed the Hindu death rituals. The entire procedure was seen as
the most important kartavya a son in particular and a family in general could have, to facilitate the soul’s journey in the cycle of samsara. Overt practices like that of performing the death rituals were justified by using all three ethics in a complex interaction with one another. Inquiry about many such practices can help understand beliefs about the nature of human existence as purported across cultural groups. Turning the discussion around to gender issues, some salient influences were observed, especially with regard to gender roles and stereotypes.

**Gendered Boundaries, Cultured Lives: Issues of Social-Moral Incompatibility**

The analysis of the father-son dilemma indicated that in contemporary times, the parent-child relationship was becoming more egalitarian and moving away from the traditional, authoritarian stereotype. But, the marital relationship still seemed to be confined to the boundaries of culturally endorsed gender stereotypes.

Self and social roles are influenced to a great extent by an individual’s gender. While the present study did not find major gender differences in the reasoning patterns, the influence of gender roles on the Indian psyche needs to be discussed further.

The cultural stereotypes for men and women in the Indian context differ greatly with regard to their role-related responsibilities. This in turn has an effect on the patterns of reasoning about issues of fairness, rights and obligations within the marital relationship for both men and women. In the present study, the third hypothetical scenario looked into the marital relationship and gender roles. Indian society, like many other (traditional) societies, has a gendered division of labor within and outside the household. Men are still considered the breadwinners, and women, the caregivers or homemakers. Situating the marital relationship in the contemporary times brought forth some interesting issues, especially those to do with individual capacities, influences of education, and value attributed to economic resources. In the
contemporary times, changing socio-economic demands on families have led to an increase in women’s contributions to the family income. While women from the lower socio-economic strata of society have always been involved in domestic labor or some form of skill based business to support family income, due to increase in levels of education many women from the upper castes and higher socio-economic classes are now taking up employment and becoming equal contributors to family income.

The cause of concern that emerges from the study is the gendered understanding of kartavya. A man’s ‘kartavya’ is to earn and maintain a family while the woman’s ‘kartavya’ or ‘gruhini dharma’ is to look after the household. As women’s identities in the Indian context are intrinsically tied with their families and familial roles (Kapadia, 1999), high internalization of gender norms by women leads them to prioritize certain duties that befit cultural stereotypes over others, sometimes at the cost of individual freedom and opportunities. For example, women are more likely to prioritize their duty towards the family over duties at other fronts. Though women’s roles are diversifying, taking care of the family in every possible manner is still perceived as a woman’s primary responsibility. The issue is whether economic independence makes women more empowered within the family or just adds to her already existing kitty of responsibilities, without any corresponding change in the perceived kartavya of men or other family members? While there were indications of the spousal relationship becoming slightly egalitarian, this was not seen in case of the father-in-law and daughter-in-law relationship. A combination of gender and role hierarchy may have complicated the matter.

A majority of respondents, men as well as women, could recognize the unfairness in the scenario when the father-in-law suggests that the daughter-in-law should forego
the job, even if she has performed well on the interview so that his son has a better chance of selection. Still, the obvious unfairness presented in the hypothetical situation was not accorded enough significance by the respondents because they thought doing so may result in negative consequences for the self as well as the family. Many of them neither engaged with these aspects deeply nor analyzed the 'deservingness factor' that seriously. Avoidance of gender norm violations was accorded more importance than the need to acknowledge the woman's capacity to solve the economic problem faced by the family. Culturally endorsed gender norms strongly acted as barriers restricting both men and women from taking a more autonomous and fairness based perspective. Studies on Oria Hindu families (Mennon, 2002a) assert the complementarity rather than inequality between men and women. While it could be argued from a cultural psychological perspective that cultures largely influence moral orientations and it is futile to look for a justice argument when none actually exists; what cannot be ignored is the conscious acceptance of unfairness which is both acknowledged and condemned by the respondents. When decisions had to be made from the daughter-in-law's perspective, many respondents attributed their decisions to the patriarchal structure of Indian society (purush pradhan samaj) where men and women were unequal. Raising similar issues, Nussbaum (2000) holds traditions and cultural norms responsible for relegating women to substandard lives, against their will. Social isolation and less opportunity also reduce women's capacity to achieve full human functioning. In such situations, women fear any change that could make matters worse for them. Even in the present study, the sub code of punishment avoidance was prominently used under the ethic of community by the parent generation, across caste groups. Many women opined that it was best to give up the opportunity than invite conflicts or negative
consequences for the self because "one has to spend the entire life with this person or family." The question then is what kind of a punishment is avoided here to uphold customary and traditional gender norms and is this not a moral violation in itself?

Another sub code of maintaining social harmony within the family also mediated the decision. Any decision which would disrupt normal family life was avoided by both men and women even if it went against the fulfillment of personal goals or seemed unfair. Indicative of the importance accorded to the smooth functioning of family life, such decisions clearly undermined the fairness factor. However, the onus of maintaining peace in the family and upholding the gender norms was much more on women than other members of the family because of which it was alright for a daughter-in-law to forego the job. While both men and women in the Indian context impart greater importance to their socio-familial roles, the boundaries were darker for women. This was understood unanimously by men and women across caste groups and generations. Tampering with culturally endorsed boundaries (more so the gendered ones) would lead to social isolation and negative implications for the self—which reinforces the pressure to conform to these norms. Ideas of samaj or the social structure, especially a patriarchal one, as an enforcing-regulating authority also come into play here. It must also be noted that the pressure of ensuring cultural continuity also rests on the shoulders of women, irrespective of their belief and conviction about many cultural norms. Mennon (2002b) espouses that Hindu (Oriya) women consider themselves as powerful agents who can hold together or devastate their conjugal homes through their actions and behaviors. Through self-control, self-refinement and service to others, women become more powerful to exert their selves in everyday life moving closer to moral purity or the achievement of dharmik sakti.
Decisions (about taking up the job or foregoing it) revolved around diligent prioritization or simultaneous execution of familial roles as women (even when men were reasoning). Yet again, issues of fairness based on individual choice (taking up the job) and familial obligations (taking care of the household) were held as parallels and not competing stakes. Incompatibility arises when women are 'naturally' expected to carry out these parallel tasks for a number of reasons. First, if the woman opted to work against all odds, she could not ignore the home front. Respondents felt she would be 'allowed' to work outside the house only if there are no corresponding disruptions within it. Second, women were (innately) better equipped to run homes and had more capacity to handle pressures at multiple fronts than men. Third, (justifying if a woman gave up the job) there would be tremendous social implications if men remained unemployed, but none in case of women. In many cases, women recognized their dual kartavya to look after the household and also earn for the family during an economic crisis, especially if one is educated and equipped to do so. This indicates that they realized their own capacities but were restricted from exercising some options or using some opportunities for fear of disrupting family life. Many non-Brahmin women reconciled to the situation in case of total opposition by stating that they would manage the household in what their husbands earned and brought home, consciously pushing away their own capacity to earn.

Social change was observed in case of some Brahmin women and young adult girls who were ready to take up double work load at both fronts but still not forego the job. Such responses can be attributed to the higher levels of education and more access to economic resources that these women had as compared to the non-Brahmin group. These factors influenced their decisions and reasoning. Many of them mentioned employing domestic helps to assist with the household chores. In a similar situation.
non-Brahmin women opted to set up household businesses \textit{(gruh udhyog)} instead of employing help to look after the home front. Yet, there is no ideological change in terms of an equitable sharing of responsibilities and opportunities between men and women or amongst different members of the family.

Across the caste groups, gender issues played up as great equalizers, indicating very little social change. Overall, practices and mentalities about gender roles were slow to change when it came to gender issues. Cultural continuity was found most among Brahmin men and non-Brahmin women and girls. This trend is a clear indicator that gender stereotypes still dominate the thinking of Brahmin men who were traditionally considered powerful and women from the non-Brahmin castes who have to face the double brunt of being women, combined with a lower status in the caste hierarchy. On the brighter side, Brahmin women now have almost equal educational opportunities, which is a major factor enabling them to combat stereotypes more efficiently. Also, increased educational opportunities to non-Brahmin men have led to some social change in their perception of gender stereotypes. At the same time, limited resources and economic considerations take priority compelling families to change in behavior, even if change at the level of mentalities is slow to occur.

The above discussion brings us back to the main issue of evaluating and judging social practices, especially by women and those who are positioned lower in the social hierarchy. Some of these practices may be perceived as oppressive and unfair. Turiel (2002) states that most research on these issues is done with dominant, privileged groups in traditional societies because of which views of others are under represented. Other groups (women, dalits, and socially underprivileged groups) may have experienced or perceived many practices as oppressive and thus it becomes necessary to examine the full spectrum of social-moral reasoning even within a culture. He also...
cites instances of co-existence of personal agency with interdependence found in many traditional societies. This view is supported even in this study.

Intracultural and cross-cultural differences in the understanding of a woman's primary role as the care giver may reveal variations across populations in the type of duty that is prioritized and the reasons thereof. At the same time, the influence of gender roles on social-moral development can also be studied more systematically. If such studies are conducted with populations in the flux of tradition and modernity, they may bring to light the lives of women struggling to change culturally endorsed, gendered stereotypes.

The next section reflects on the methods used in the study.

**Methodological Reflections**

**In Defense of Qualitative Research:** Looking back on some methodological aspects of the study, it seems that an ethnographic, observation-based method which integrates in-depth interviews would have been more flattering to the cultural psychological perspective. Weisner (1997) discusses ethnography as a useful method in human development which can easily complement other quantitative methods and produce a complete picture of culturally embedded processes of development. Had the study used such a method, it would have efficiently documented many 'naturally occurring family interactions and practices, which in turn would tighten the explanations about certain mentalities. Although the study has been able to achieve this goal to some extent, support from observed, 'on-field' data would enliven the results and make them more 'believable'. However, inadequate training and expertise in such anthropological methods may also spring up unforeseen challenges of data management. Issues of recording relevant instances and weeding out unnecessary information may also arise. But studies in the future may be planned keeping in mind the
need for a triangulation of methods which can capture the subtleties of tacit family socialization, essential for the study of social-moral development.

Explaining the "goodness" of qualitative research, Peshkin (1993) wants to place quantitative research in a broader framework that acknowledges the value of this "goodness." The value of qualitative research and its contribution to the understanding of social realities must be realized within and outside the social sciences. Time and again, cultural psychologists have also drawn attention to the contributions of qualitative approaches to understanding human development (Shweder, 1996, Miller, 1997). Unfortunately, many scientific communities are either unaware or blind to these procedures, considering them almost unscientific in nature.

Rapport building with respondents, fixing up mutually convenient timings, being sensitive to their rights and needs, systematic data recording and documentation are all ethically desirable but time-consuming aspects of qualitative research. The challenge of qualitative research is to survive this tedious but extremely significant step of the research process. Any discounts at this level would have serious implications on the quality and authenticity of the data. The process of data collection and documentation for the present study took 6-8 months. Along with this, the present study required meticulous coding of all responses within a frame of approximately 50 sub codes per interview. For this, all data had to be documented (typewritten, in this case) after initial translation. While all these procedures are a normal requirement for any qualitative research, the relatively large sample size of the present study made it seem like an uphill task.

**Hypothetical Scenarios:** A study using hypothetical scenarios has its own limitations and applicability. For the present study, on a number of occasions many respondents came forward with their own experiences which matched the situations presented in
the scenarios. This not only strengthened the ecological validity of the scenarios but also reassured the investigator that the respondents were really engaged in thinking about these issues and were not merely answering questions. But some limitations remained. Even if there were attempts to make the scenarios ‘almost real’, the respondents were not actually experiencing the events mentioned in scenarios. The investigator hence ran the risk of just getting opinions or third person perspectives on issues. The predictive value of results of such studies is less, especially if applied to real-life situations. Discussing the usefulness of experimental studies about unethical behavior, Bersoff (1999) criticizes the traditional use of vignettes employed in studying moral behavior and attitudes. The use of vignettes, he feels, is insufficient to capture the psychological complexities of actually being in a situation and thus provides only limited insights into moral behavior. Future research can be strengthened by the use of real-life dilemmas around similar issues. Studies investigating methodological approaches and their effectiveness could compare the use of hypothetical versus real-life dilemmas on similar populations.

**Coding Manual:** The intricacies of the Big Three Ethics coding manual (Jensen, 1996) are difficult to decipher if a person is not well versed or familiar with previous literature based on which the manual was created. The aptness of the manual for qualitative data limits the scope to quantify the coding procedures and apply varied parametric statistical tests. As most qualitative data bring out multiple responses, it is difficult to calculate minimum and maximum scores each person can achieve in the use of the ethics. Attempts to quantify the coding manual will only restrict its use and render it inapplicable to a range of social-moral issues. Methods to score the manual in a more systematic manner can be explored.
Throughout the study, it was evident that most respondents used the ethic of community in combination with the ethic of autonomy (e.g., father-son dilemma, gender based dilemma). The qualitative analysis could capture this component well, but the lack of quantifiable features in the manual does not enable the statistical measurement of this association. Vainio (2003) also felt that the interrelations between ethics are not testable using the present coding manual. There is also a possibility that the ethics are used in a hierarchical manner, that is, when more than one ethic is used but one of them is given more priority than others, depending on the issue at hand (e.g., Hindu death rituals, helping an injured person). It is difficult to establish the relative proportion of ethic use without enough scope for quantification.

The next section highlights the major conclusions of the study, indicating some implications and directions for further research.

**Conclusions and Implications of the Study**

The major conclusions of the study were as follows:

- Respondents revealed a pattern of finding the middle path (*madhala rasta*) to amicably resolve any hypothetical scenario. This was supported by the simultaneous use of the ethic of autonomy and community for many responses. Only when there were extremely limited choices, they preferred using the ethic of community over other ethics. Although the ethic of community was used most prominently, more so by non-Brahmins, the ethic of autonomy was also substantially used. However, it was almost always used simultaneously with the ethic of community. The influences of education and socio-economic status on this pattern of ethic use need to be acknowledged. The study indicated a pattern of social-moral reasoning most likely to be preferred by urban Indians in the midst of tradition and modernity. Autonomous personal goals consistently co-existed with
the performance of social duties or responsibilities, and as far as possible, neither was discounted for the other. Efforts were made to accommodate components of autonomy and community in the best possible manner and most decisions revolved around achieving this delicate balance.

- Cultural continuity was found most in upholding customary and traditional authority concerning gender norms and social change was most evident in case of the parent-child relationship which was becoming more accommodative and egalitarian, moving away from the authoritarian model. While there were indications of some egalitarianism in the spousal relationship, deference to the in-laws' authority still prevailed. Issues of inconsistency in reasoning attributable to the agent's gender and role (daughter-in-law) were abundant. This was clearly found when respondents reasoned from the daughter-in-law's perspective as against the husband's or the father-in-law's perspective.

- The salient use of the ethic of divinity was most for the overt practice of performing the Hindu death rituals. Although the study captured very little use of divinity in the other three scenarios, its significance cannot be undermined. More studies can bring forth the subtle influence of divinity in everyday life. To a great extent, influences of divinity can be tapped by understanding lived interpretations of the Hindu worldview and beliefs about religion and spirituality. Such studies can also comment on Hinduism as a way of life, wherein religion is inextricably intertwined with everyday socio-cultural practices.

The study provides substantial information about the cultural grounding of social-moral reasoning. Gender is also accorded significance throughout the study, raising pertinent questions about the incompatibility of culturally endorsed gender norms within universal social-moral frames. The study has implications for creating
culturally grounded programs of gender sensitivity which can be used in schools and communities at large. The study gives directions to raise debates on issues of cultural continuity and social change, affecting different groups (men-women, parents-children, Brahmins-non-Brahmins) in varying proportions. The study indicates that young adults hold a lot of promise for bringing about social change and gender equity within family life in future. The parent generation (including in-laws) in turn can play a significant buffering role in providing acceptance and encouragement to any change initiated by their young adult children.

Future Directions

The present study was limited to a specific regional community (Maharashtrians in Baroda) in the Indian context. Further studies can interweave diverse communities within India and look for intra-cultural differences or similarities. At the same time, there is enough scope to pursue cross-cultural comparisons on this topic, especially with respect to differences or similarities in the use of ethics. Important, cross-cultural studies in the area have more potential to highlight the influences of indigenous concepts like dharma, karma, belief in fate or destiny and others. More cross-cultural studies would also lead to the revision and diversification of the Big Three coding manual.

Although the study indicates very little use of the ethic of divinity in resolving familial issues, divinity seems to be playing a subtle but extremely significant role in the development of social-moral reasoning in the Indian context. This ethic needs further exploration, not just in terms of its content but also its relative influence on other ethics. Possibilities of divinity shaping other ethics, especially the concept of self (autonomy) and the social order (community) cannot be denied. However, the incitement conditions to bring divinity aspects to fore (hypothetical scenarios or other
methods) need to be systematically designed and tested out. Specific to the Indian context, studies which illuminate understanding about the concepts of karma and dharma and their influence on social-moral development are necessary. These studies can map the use of the Big Three ethics along the frames of karma and dharma. One should not be surprised if these overarching concepts transcend or engulf all three ethics. While there are difficulties in researching these tacit concepts, the key to corner them lies in decoding the ethic of divinity. Overt religious and ritualistic practices within Indian family life are aplenty and these can provide a strong basis to unearth our understanding about divinity.

More hypothetical situations and dilemmas can be tested out to determine diversity in social-moral reasoning in various spheres of life. As the limitations of using hypothetical dilemmas are many, real-life dilemmas would best elucidate actual applications of social-moral reasoning. Well-designed studies, sensitive to the methodological pitfalls in the area of social-moral development, hence become the need of the hour. Studying reasoning processes when individuals reconcile with unfair situations and take a retrospective view on past life events can be good starting points.

Interdisciplinary studies are also needed to strengthen the applications of moral theories from a cultural perspective. In the era of globalization, explaining the ethical issues involved in the application of new technologies like stem-cell research, cloning, bio-engineering and the like becomes mandatory.

The final section reflects on the conceptual framework of the study, restructuring it to integrate unique aspects of social-moral development in the Indian cultural context.

**Integrating Self, Kartavya and Samaj: A Re-Structured Conceptual Framework**

Urbanization, globalization and increase in levels of education are macro influences affecting urban Indians. All the above factors have an effect on the traditional
interpretation of the Hindu world view held by individuals. The present study indicates that the ethics of autonomy and community are intricately intertwined in Indian mentalities and behaviors, and the ethic of divinity exerts subtle yet significant influences on socio-cultural practices as well as the use of the other two ethics. The *ashrama dharma* theory seems an apt framework to understand the use of the three ethics (autonomy, community and divinity) across the life-span.

As individuals progress from one life-stage to another (*Ashramas* Brahmacharya to *Grihasta ashrama*), their corresponding duties and obligations (*kartavya*) increase and diversify. *Kartavya* is intrinsically dependent on an individual’s gender, roles and positions in family and society. In the Indian context, managing varied roles and parallel responsibilities necessitates that the nature of the self remain more “encompassing” (Mascolo et al. 2004) for successful, socially desirable adult development. This makes *Grihasta ashrama* one of the most challenging life stages for adult Hindus. Successfully balancing individual needs and aspirations (autonomy) vis-à-vis social role obligations (community) thus becomes an important developmental task in the social-moral domain, the successful achievement of which ensures cultural continuity and individual well-being.

In the present study, readiness for social change was evident among young adults, especially girls, and some educated parents. The young adults were still unmarried and individuals from the parent generation were yet to become parents-in-law. While individuals already in the stage of *Grihasta ashrama* may find it very difficult to bring about social change, those who are on the brink of entering it (young adults) with a readiness to change stereotypes, may achieve more success. However, in the Indian context, young adults would find it very difficult to achieve this end without the
Figure 18. Integrating *kartavya*, self and *samaj*: A re-structured conceptual framework.

In *Batatya chi Chaal*, Deshpande (1958) personifies a typical Mumbai chawl which represents traditional Maharashtrian society. Towards the end of this interesting
The chawl informs readers about what modernity and change has done to its social fabric. The following excerpt illustrates that cultural communities cannot escape social change. But like they accept change, they consciously and willingly regulate cultural continuity as well.

"Houssla ghatanechya niyamat bandhaley nantarchya pudhane Chaliila oolava osarla, fakta ool rahile Pan apun dhage tule rahit Apanahee chaliit kagna-munjje jhati tar manse aanga modun rabtat Karya ghar che ahe, mhantat Kuthe tari ekach nalachya panyakun prem ale te tible ahe Pan te kiti tikwaar ahe hie chaliila chunta ahe"

The natural wish to celebrate every occasion was restricted by the next generation to only formal and ritualistic practice. The (wet) depth of relationships that bound people together (oolava) evaporated with time, only dampness (of a dilapidated building) remained. But some strands still remain unbroken. Even now if there are weddings and thread ceremonies (auspicious occasions) in the chawl, residents willingly tire themselves to help the other. They say, it is an occasion in "our house." Somewhere from only one tap (source) love (feeling of belongingness) flowed in and has survived (in the chawl). But how long will it last? The chawl is worried about this.

(My translation of an excerpt from P. L. Deshpande’s (1991) Batatiya chi Chal, pp 182)