Results

Study 1- Moral Reasoning among Children in India: A Cross-Sectional Study

To test the hypotheses, 2 (Age) X 2 (SES) multivariate analyses of covariance (MANCOVAs) were conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The use of each of the three ethics across the five scenarios formed the dependent variables.

Total number of reasons provided by participants was entered as a covariate. An a priori analysis of variance (ANOVA) had indicated two main effects. One was for age, F (1, 136) = 7.63, p<.05, η^2 = .11 (middle childhood: M = 6.70, SD = 2.80, early adolescence: M = 8.10, SD = 3.78). The other main effect was for SES, F (1, 136) = 17.17, p<.001, η^2 = .05 (high SES: M = 8.50, SD = 3.47, low SES: M = 6.37, SD = 2.96). Total number of reasons was entered as a covariate to ensure that any significant differences in the use of the three ethics could not be accounted for by some groups providing more reasons than others. It was a significant covariate in all analyses.

Table 1

Degree of Use of Three Ethics: Means (Standard Deviations) and Main Effects

Ethic	Age				SES			
	Middle Childhood	Early Adolescence	F	η^2	High	Low	F	η^2
Autonomy	3.01 (2.03)	4.02 (2.31)	2.66	.02	4.26 (2.21)	2.77 (1.98)	3.80*	.03
Community	1.01 (1.03)	1.52 (0.15)	3.71*	.03	1.41 (1.07)	1.12 (1.13)	0.01	.00
Divinity	2.93 (1.97)	2.80 (2.27)	8.27**	.05	3.12 (2.37)	2.61 (1.81)	3.61$^+$	.03

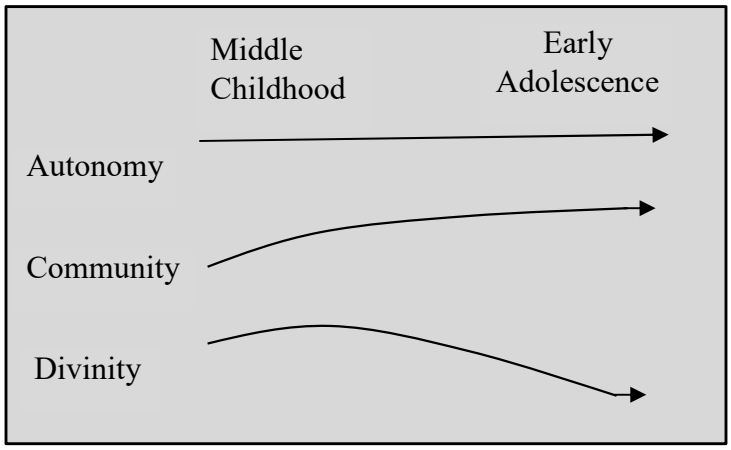
**p < .01. *p < .05. ^+p < .10.

For the Ethic of Autonomy, as seen in Table 1, there was a significant main effect for SES. As hypothesized, high-SES children employed this ethic more than low-SES children. For the Ethic of Community, there was a significant main effect for age. As hypothesized, older

children used this kind of reasoning more than younger children. With respect to the Ethic of Divinity, there was an unexpected main effect for age. Younger children used this ethic more than older ones. There was also an unexpected trend where high-SES children reasoned more in terms of Divinity than low-SES children. Figure 8 illustrates the expression of the cultural-developmental template among the younger and older participants.

Figure 8

Resultant Expression of the Template among Indian Participants in Middle Childhood and Early Adolescence



Types of Reasons Used Within Each Ethic

In order to delve into the types of reasons used within the three ethics, a two-step process was used. First, "majority types" were identified in the same manner as in past research (Jensen & McKenzie, 2016). Second, quotations by the children that referenced each majority type were culled from the interviews, and representative excerpts are presented. These excerpts are presented both to flesh out how the children spoke, and to point to the roles of culture, age, and SES in children's understandings of the three ethics in general and the majority types in particular.

To identify the majority types, the frequency with which the age and SES group used every type of reason was calculated (as described above the coding manual differentiates more than 40 types). Next, the types with the highest frequencies were added up until a threshold of

50% was reached. For example, for the older low-SES children we added frequencies starting with the most frequent type of reason (i.e., "Divinity: Punishment avoidance from Gods" at 21.5%, as shown in the last column of Table 2) and moving downward until we had surpassed the sum of 50%. The cut-off was set at 50% because this captured the majority of types used and the remaining types were infrequent. Table 2 shows the use of majority types. The sample as whole reasoned in terms of a total of 12 types. The children conceptualized each of the three ethics in multiple ways. Specifically, the entire sample reasoned in terms of 6 majority types for Autonomy, 2 for Community, and 4 for Divinity.

Table 2

Majority Use of Types of Reasons (Percent)

		Middle Childhood		**Early Adolescence**	
Ethics	**Types**	**High-SES**	**Low-SES**	**High-SES**	**Low-SES**
Autonomy	Punishment Avoidance to Self	13.1	20.7	4.6	12.1
	Reciprocity	6.9			7.0
	Means-Ends Considerations: Ends of an Individual	6.5		7.2	
	Other Individual's Psychological Wellbeing	4.8		7.2	
	Self's Psychological Wellbeing			8.7	
	Conscience (Guilt)			4.3	
Community	Punishment Avoidance: Social Sanctions		8.0		7.8
	Duty to Others			5.5	5.9
Divinity	Punishment avoidance from God(s)	15.9	30.0	8.7	21.5
	God(s)' Authority	7.3			
	Customary Authority of Religious/Spiritual Nature	4.2		5.2	
	Duty as a Spiritual/Religious Being			4.9	

Next, we turn to a more detailed elaboration of the majority types shown in Table 2 through a presentation of quotations by the children. For the sake of clarity, each majority type is underlined when first introduced. Also, indigenous words and expressions that were preserved in English translations of interviews are italicized with approximate translations in parentheses.

Majority Types within the Ethic of Autonomy. There were no age group differences in use of the Ethic of Autonomy (as expected). Reciprocity was a majority type among both younger children (high-SES) and older children (low-SES), and they expressed the idea in similar words. One younger child explained that "I will help my friend with the homework because suppose someday I need help, she will also help me then." An older child said, "[I will share] because someday when I don't have something, he will share his things with me." Both younger and older children also spoke of reciprocity in regard to animals. Here is how one child put it: "Animals give us so much love, we should also give them the same love." Commonly, then, children in middle childhood and early adolescence expressed the idea that you should treat others, animals and humans, as you would wish for them to treat you.

Punishment avoidance to the self was also a common concern among younger and older children. There are different ways of conceptualizing punishment avoidance within each of the three ethics, as described further below. Within the Ethic of Autonomy, the focus is on harm or cost to the individual person rather than on the social context of sanctions or God's punishment. Younger and older children from both SES groups described how wrongdoing would result in punishment to the self from parents, especially mothers. They also mentioned teachers, and sometimes the police.

While low- and high-SES children referenced similar sources of punishment to the self, a closer reading of the interviews indicated that the two groups described different kinds of punishment. Children from the low-SES families primarily spoke of physical punishment. Here are three of many examples: "He should tell everyone that he broke the idol because mummy would beat me, right? *Phat phat* (sound made when being struck), like that she would beat me with a stick"; "No, we will not give the homework because the teacher will…beat us with a

ruler"; and "She should not take the money, otherwise someone will see her and they will complain to the police and then at the police station she will have to take beatings, that's why." High-SES children did not speak of "beatings," but instead mostly feared being "scolded." For example, one child said, "I will tell my mother. Later if she finds out or if I have to tell her, then she may scold me more, saying that 'why did you not stop me? I could have made fresh *prashād* again." Another described how "If I give [my homework] and the teacher finds out, then I will be scolded."

The high-SES children's focus on being verbally reprimanded ties in with other ways that they spoke about the Ethic of Autonomy. Their focus was on the psychological side of persons, including aspirations, emotions, and internal motivations. As described above, high-SES children reasoned more in terms of Autonomy than low-SES children (as expected). Four kinds of reasons were majority types among high-SES children but not the low-SES children, and all of these invoked the psychological side of individuals.

High-SES children spoke of means-ends considerations where the end often centered on individual aspirations and accomplishments. For example, a child stated: "I will play the [soccer] match and win, then I will get selected for the national-level game and win medals." Another child highlighted the value of attaining independence, explaining that: "Everyone should know how to live independently and to make decisions independently. If we don't do our homework sincerely but [instead] depend on others, then in the future how will we be successfully independent?"

High-SES children also spoke of both another individual's psychological wellbeing and the self's psychological wellbeing. Speaking of the mother who had made *prashād* , one child said that "If [the] mother finds out she will feel bad. She will think 'Is this what I have taught my

daughter?' She will be too sad." Speaking of the school friend, another child thought that "If I give her my homework then she will feel better." Just as they discussed negative and positive emotions experienced by other individuals, they did the same for the self. Using an indigenous concept, one child detailed how "If [I] stayed quiet [about breaking the idol of *Ganesh*] then I would be affected by it. I would get dreams about it at night, and it would give me *dukh* (sorrow or anguish)." Helping an injured kitten, one child exclaimed, "It would feel so good! If you are able to save someone's life through your efforts, then it would feel very good." A fourth majority type invoked by high-SES children (in early adolescence) pertained to one's conscience. At some length, these children spoke about an internal—and often enduring—feeling of guilt. Here is how one child, among several, discussed how the prospect of guilt ought to hinder a transgression: "You don't want to feel guilty for what you have done because it will bother you forever. You will keep thinking of how the owner of the wallet frantically searched for their wallet and the troubles they had because you stole their hard-earned money. That guilt will never go away."

Majority Types within the Ethic of Community. The Ethic of Community was more common among older children than younger ones (as expected). There were two majority types within this ethic. Duty to others was only a majority type among early adolescents. These children often spoke of responsibilities that come from being a friend and family member. As one child made clear, "She is my friend and friends always help their friends. Otherwise, you are not really a friend." Invoking the indigenous concepts of *kartavya*, another child said, "She is a friend of mine… It's not like she was lazy or she was not serious about the homework, but she had a real reason. So it is my *kartavya* (duty) that I help her out, because she is my friend." Still another child likened friends to siblings, saying that "We should help our friends, they are like our brothers and sisters." Some children also spoke of their duties to parents. For example, one

child said: “We should tell our parents because our parents…they do everything for us. We are who we are because of their hard work. We should not hide anything from them, it is our duty to tell them the truth even if it is something wrong you did.”

In addition to speaking of duties to people to whom one is close, the adolescents also commonly described communal membership as obligating people to help those in need. Invoking indigenous concepts that cannot easily be translated into English words, a number of older children spoke of *faraj* and *zimmedari*. We will return to these two concepts, as well as *kartavya*, in the Discussion. One child explained that “It is our *faraj* (duty) to help others in need. (Researcher: Also an animal?) Yes.” Another child said, “Animals are very nice, and they give us a lot of love. We must take *zimmedari* (responsibility) [and help].” Another child, invoking both indigenous concepts simultaneously, said, “Because it is everyone's *zimmedari* (responsibility) and *faraj* (duty) to help everyone. We have to help others.” Concisely, once child simply declared: “It is my *faraj* (duty) to help others.”

Apart from duty to others, the other Ethic of Community majority type was <u>punishment avoidance in the form of social sanctions</u>. This was a majority type among low-SES children. Unlike reasoning pertaining to punishment avoidance within the Ethic of Autonomy, the moral reasoning here indicated a deep concern with one’s status and inclusion in the neighborhood community. One child explained that “There will be someone who is around and [they] will see that I took the money. Then they will tell everyone and then everyone will call me ‘Thief! Thief!’ They won’t leave me, they will beat me. They will always call me a thief.” In a vivid description, another child exclaimed: “I will not steal any money! I will go and tell my mother everything. What if people in my neighborhood see me and if they talked? They will always call me names and won’t keep relations with me. *Beizzati ho jaaegi* (I will lose honor).” Also concerned about

maintaining honor, a child explained the importance of being honest about having broken the neighborhood idol of *Ganesh*: "If we lie, we are liars. Then everyone will call me a liar; *beizzati ho jaaegi*." Low-SES children were similar to high-SES children in their degree of Ethic of Community reasoning (contrary to expectations). The use of majority types, however, showed that low-SES children were notably concerned with remaining in good standing within their neighborhood and avoiding dishonor and ostracism.

Majority Types within the Ethic of Divinity. The Ethic of Divinity was used not only by older children, but also younger children (as expected). Younger children, in fact, surpassed older children in their use of Divinity (unexpectedly). Punishment avoidance from God(s) was a highly popular majority type among all children and certainly among younger ones. The children overwhelmingly spoke in terms of the indigenous concept of *paap*. For example, one child stated that "If we just take away someone's hard-earned money, then…we will get *paap* (punishment from God). God will punish us for it." Another child explained that "We have to tell [that we broke the idol] because it is God's idol that has broken. [If we don't], then *Ganapati dada* (the God *Ganesh*) will teach us a lesson. Then we will fall ill, get high fever, vomiting, all that: *paap*." Still another child described how "If I see the injured kitten but choose to go for a [soccer] match instead of helping her, then that will be *paap*. God will make us a kitten in our next life, just like the dying kitten, and then no one will help us." According to the children, *paap* encompasses consequences that are both material and immaterial, involve both body and soul, and pertain to both this life and the next.

There was a trend (unexpected) for high-SES children to use the Ethic of Divinity more than low-SES children. Three kinds of reasons were majority types among high-SES children but not the low-SES children. High-SES children spoke of God(s)' authority, which entails following

directives that God has provided as well as aiming to please and not displease God. One child, for example, argued that "[He] should tell everyone that the idol broke because of him. He should not lie because then *Ganeshji* will feel bad that we lied to everyone. *Ganeshji* will feel very sad." (*Ji* is a suffix that indicates respect.) Another child spoke of God's anger, "God will definitely see her and then God will become angry. God will feel very bad and will think 'why should I eat food that is for me but tasted already by someone else?' God likes it more if we offer fresh food, with clean hands."

High-SES children also spoke of the importance of following customary authority of a religious or spiritual nature. The children often spoke in detail about common and tangible activities in the community and the home. One child described how "everyone [in the neighborhood] prays together in the evenings for the 10 days of this festival. That is how it has always been, it is a tradition that we follow every year. How can I not tell them that I broke the idol? If I tell them, we can follow the tradition and immerse the broken idol [in water]. Then we can together welcome a new idol and continue offering prayers." Another child elaborated on how "We can't offer tasted *prashād* to God. [The way we do it is that we] first put all [the food] that is made in front of God to make the offering. We then do *aarti* (light oil lamps that are offered to God), then we say some *mantras* (chants or phrases) and *shlokas* (verses). Then the cover over the *prashād* has to be opened a little bit, only for God to taste. And after saying a prayer, it can [then] be eaten by everyone."

The third majority type used only by high-SES children (older ones) pertained to duty as a spiritual or religious being. For example, one child stated: "All living beings are sacred because God gives them life. It is also said that God is present in everything in nature, including us and the kitten too. How can we then ignore the kitten that is hurt and maybe dying? We should help the kitten. It is our duty to do that. If we help the kitten then it is like service to God, which we

must do to at least say thanks to God for what he has given us." Using the indigenous term of *kartavya* also mentioned above, one child stated that "We are not helpless like animals. We are humans and it is our *kartavya* to help. Once I have seen the [injured] kitten, I must save it."

Summary of Results for Study 1

1. There was no significant difference in the degree of use of Autonomy among participants in middle childhood and early adolescence. However, social class impacted Ethic of Autonomy reasoning. High-SES children used this ethic more than low-SES children and conceptualized the individual in independent and psychological terms; in contrast, low-SES children's view of Autonomy often invoked fear of physical punishment.
2. Participants in early adolescence reasoned in terms of a remarkably rich set of indigenous duty concepts, contributing to their using the Ethic of Community more than participants in middle childhood. However, participants from the high and low SES did not differ significantly in their degree of use of Community.
3. Children in middle childhood already reasoned substantially in terms of the Ethic of Divinity, likely due to the many ways that Indian culture incorporates divinity into everyday beliefs and behaviors. There was a significant trend in the degree of use of Divinity, where the high-SES participants used this ethic more frequently than their low-SES counterparts.

Study 2- Moral Reasoning in Childhood and Adolescence: A Longitudinal Study

To test the hypothesis split-plot analyses of variance (ANOVA) were conducted using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The split-plot ANOVA is a form of repeated measures ANOVA used to test one between and one within subjects factor at a time.

First, a 2 (Age) X 2 (Sex) repeated measures ANOVA was conducted to know whether there was a need to control for any significant differences in the total number of reasons given by any of the age or gender groups. Results for age showed a trend for the total number of reasons used, F (1, 68) = 2.29, p<.10, η^2=.32 (Total Reasons - Childhood: M= 8.80, SD= 3.61, Adolescence: M=12.82, SD= 4.35). The total number of reasons was added as a covariate to test the effect of age on ethic use. Split-plot ANCOVAs were conducted with each of the three ethics as the dependent variable.

Table 3

Degree of Use of Three Ethics: Means (Standard Deviations) and Main Effects

Ethic	Age			
	Childhood	**Adolescence**	**F**	**η^2**
Autonomy	4.26 (2.21)	7.56 (3.24)	3.48*	.45
Community	1.42 (1.07)	3.14 (1.72)	.02	.05
Divinity	3.13 (2.37)	2.13 (1.75)	4.90*	.59

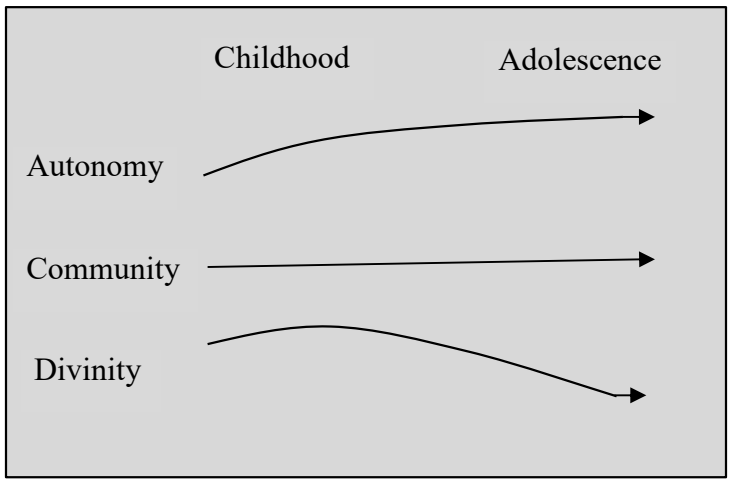
**p < .01. *p < .05. ^{+}p < .10.

For the Ethic of Autonomy, as seen in Table 3, there was a significant main effect for age, F (1, 69) = 3.47, p<.05, η^2= .45. As hypothesized, the use of Autonomy increased from childhood to adolescence. For the Ethic of Community, there was no significant difference by age. Contrary to our hypothesis, the degree of use of Community remained the same between childhood and adolescence, although the type of reasons used varied. For the Ethic of Divinity also, there was a significant main effect of age, F (1, 69) = 4.90, p < .05, η^2 = .59. Participants

used Divinity more in childhood than in adolescence. Therefore, as hypothesized, the use of Divinity decreased from childhood to adolescence (see Figure 9).

Figure 9

Resultant Expression of the Template among Indian Participants in Childhood and Adolescence

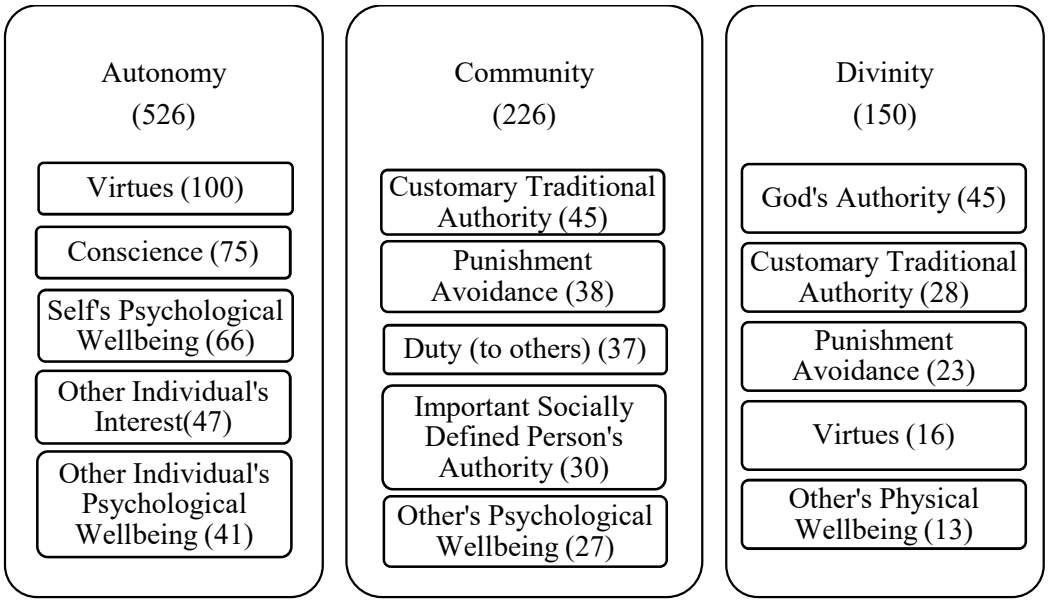


Types of Reasons Used by Adolescents

Frequencies were calculated to examine the types of reasons used by adolescent participants. Figure 10 shows five most prominently used moral concepts from each ethic and their total frequencies. Additionally, verbatim responses by the adolescents that referenced each type were culled from the interviews to represent underlying moral concepts.

Figure 10

Types of Moral Reasons Used by Adolescents across the Three Ethics (Total Frequencies)



Majority Types within the Ethic of Autonomy. Virtues were the most frequently used moral concepts within the Ethic of Autonomy. Table 4 shows the 10 most prominent virtues in adolescents' moral reasoning and verbatim responses to show how these virtues aid one's inner moral compass and caution one against transgressions. Even while these virtues within the Ethic of Autonomy pertain to attitudes and traits that emphasize individuality and personal choice in the coding manual, verbatim responses from adolescent participants highlight that most virtues were used in relation to others and were most commonly situated in the context of relationships (see Table 4).

Table 4

Adolescent Responses Involving Virtues within the Ethic of Autonomy

Sr. No.	Virtue	Verbatim
1	Honesty	A lie may seem simple but it's not just a lie if it hurts others and their feelings. If my mother strongly believes in God, then I should not be dishonest about tasting the *prashād.* I will not lie to my mother.
2	Altruism	It is important to help others in need. Especially if their need is genuine.
3	Independence	If I help her the wrong way once, then she will expect it all the time. She may get into the habit of not doing her work even when she can,

		just because she knows I will be around to help. She will become dependent. She needs to learn to be independent and to think for herself.
4	Empathy	First of all it hurts. Imagine how the other person (owner of the wallet) will feel? They will feel so bad. We should first put ourselves in their shoes and see how it feels when someone takes away their hard earned money without asking!
5	Sympathy	I will feel really bad that she (the kitten) has to suffer, that no one is helping her. I will definitely help. I feel bad for her.
6	Humanity	Leaving the kitten to suffer alone--that is so inhumane. Where is your humanity? We need to fix our priorities. Helping someone is much more important than a match or an award. The match will happen again. The poor kitten may not live.
7	Compassion	We humans have been given a heart full of emotions and feelings. We feel for others. Even animals have feelings and they care for their loved ones, including their human friends. Why can't we show the same love?
8	Selflessness	We should not think about ourselves. We should first think for others then think for our own good. When someone is in need we should help them first. We can't just knowingly walk away and let them suffer.
9	Hard work	My parents have faced a lot of hardship in life and I have never seen them ask for money. I have seen them work very hard. Hard earned money brings way more happiness than borrowed or stolen money.
10	Trust	They share a relationship of trust. We don't trust anyone as much as we trust our best friend. So to build and maintain that trust you should help. You should honor the trust she has in your friendship.

A second moral concept frequently invoked by adolescents pertains to one's conscience and the feeling of guilt. Adolescents spoke of conscience in a variety of ways. Here are three of many examples: "I will feel degraded and ashamed for not telling my mom [that I let her offer tasted *prashād* to God]. It will forever haunt me, every time there is a pujā (worship)", "my head will hurt from thinking of the incident [breaking the *Ganesh* idol] over and over again. My conscience won't let me concentrate on my studies—studies are an important part of my life right now, it will hamper my progress", and "I will get bad dreams every night about the kitten suffering all alone. I will regret all my life and feel horribly guilty."

Adolescents were also concerned with self's psychological wellbeing. Speaking of the importance of life, an adolescent said, "I would regret that I didn't help the kitten. I will feel sad, selfish, upset and everything bad. Maybe angry too. I had the chance to save a precious life and I

didn't." Using an indigenous concept, one adolescent shared how "We get *santosh* (contentment / satisfaction) from being able to help those in need. If I had a chance to help and I didn't take it, I would always have a sense of dissatisfaction in my mind, for myself that I could have done better." Participants also reflected on their inner selves. For example, an adolescent stated: "Nothing may change on the outside but on the inside we will feel disturbed. We will always remember that we bought the sweets from someone else's money, we basically stole money and so it will hurt every time we think of it." Adolescent participants in particular, spoke of feelings of embarrassment and *beizzati* (humiliation) when the scenarios involved large groups such as neighbors, classmates, or their sports teams. For example, one younger adolescent (grade 8) explained "It would be so embarrassing to tell everyone [neighbors] and get scolded in front of everyone [for breaking the *Ganesh* idol]. I would feel too embarrassed to tell them the truth." In response to the scenario of helping a classmate, an older adolescent (grade 11) shared "She (the teacher) may also humiliate my friend in class, in front of all our classmates. *Beizzati* (humiliation) doesn't feel good at all. It feels horrible. It is not my friend's fault that she belongs to a poor family."

Participants also went beyond a concern for their own psychological wellbeing, to acknowledge a deep concern for the interests of other individuals, including not just humans but also other living beings. Explaining the need to help an injured kitten, an adolescent explained, "Who knows about the afterlife but this life that we have now is special and is important. We should enjoy life to the fullest and if I see that a kitten can't do the same and I can change that by helping her, then I must help."

Table 5

A Comparison of the Types of Reasons Used in Childhood and Adolescence (Frequencies)

Ethic	Types	Childhood	Adolescence
Autonomy	Punishment Avoidance to Self	54	36
	Virtues (Autonomy-oriented)	19	100
	Conscience (Guilt)	17	75
	Other Individual's Interest	13	47
	Self's Psychological Wellbeing	36	66
	Other Individual's Psychological Wellbeing	39	41
Community	Customary Traditional Authority	10	45
	Punishment Avoidance: Social Sanctions	12	38
	Others Psychological Wellbeing	14	27
	Important Socially-defined Person's Authority	19	30
	Duty to Others	28	37
Divinity	Punishment Avoidance from God(s)	76	23
	Customary Traditional Authority	30	28
	God's Authority	31	45
	Others Physical Wellbeing	0	13
	Virtues	12	16

A comparison of the types of reasons used by participants through childhood and adolescence (see Table 5) highlighted an increase in the use of concepts such as one's own psychological wellbeing, other individual's interest, conscience and virtues within the ethic of Autonomy. On the other hand, Punishment avoidance to self was a concern more prominent in childhood compared to adolescence and its use decreased considerably during adolescence.

Majority Types within the Ethic of Community. While quantitative analysis showed that there was no significant difference in the degree of use of Community through childhood and adolescence, a closer look at the types of reasons used suggested that there was a substantial increase in the diversity of types of moral concepts employed by participants in adolescence.

As seen in Figure 10, adolescents frequently referred to customary traditional practices (social derived) and reflected on social or familial practices, customs and traditions in their moral reasoning. Explaining why *prashād cannot* be tasted before making an offering to God, one adolescent declared: "Because that's how my ancestors, grandparents and parents have done it.

Now I will follow the same because we have been taught that this is important." There were plenty of responses that highlighted such elaborate practices in the participants' homes. Here are three of the many examples: "We are Gujarati and in our homes we do *pujā* on festivals, special occasions like birthdays or for anything that brings happiness. When we do *pujā* we make fresh *sheerā* (sweet) and offer it first to God. We can then eat the *sheerā*", "Even the first mango of the season that is brought home is offered first to God and then eaten by us. This has always been a practice in my family", and "Whenever my grandmother cooks she prepares two plates of food-- one to be offered to cows and the other to God. My family deeply believes in God. I don't, but if that's the tradition in my family, I will follow it and not hurt their feelings."

Apart from customary traditional authority, major types of moral reasons used by adolescents included punishment avoidance (social sanctions) and others' psychological wellbeing. Adolescents made references to an array of possible forms of punishments from members of their social groups apart from scoldings such as accusations, hatred, loss of honor/reputation *(beizzati),* loss of trust and unfair character judgments. For example, speaking of the scenario involving the football match, an adolescent explained, "If I am really a good player then my team is counting on me for a winning performance on-field! So I need to reach the field on time. Otherwise they may not trust me again and may accuse me of not doing what is in the best interest of the team!" In response to the scenario involving the broken *Ganesh* idol, one adolescent expressed worry "Not everyone is reasonable, not everyone understands and gives us a fair chance to explain. They may assume that I did it on purpose and express their anger towards me and my family." Another adolescent explained "They may judge me for my mistake and think I am a liar. They may later show hatred towards me." It was also common for adolescents to make references to the loss of reputation and honor. Here are two of the many

examples: “Our family and relatives have a certain impression of us based on our personality, how we talk and behave. If we steal money then we will fall in their eyes and they will lose all hope for us. They will not trust us again”, and “If we get caught cheating, then we will lose honor or respect in the eyes of our classmates, friends and the teacher.” Thus, adolescents clearly saw themselves and their behavior as organically situated within a social context of significant relationships rather than as exclusive and independent entities. This was further illustrated by the emphasis on other’s psychological wellbeing in their moral reasoning. Highlighting this awareness of themselves in relation to significant others, adolescents gave the following responses: “[if I was caught stealing money] my parents will feel that they failed as parents—that will be their first thought. My family will be so disheartened. My failure is their failure” and “If I don’t reach the match on time, my team will feel like I let them down after all the hours of practice together, and the *josh* (enthusiasm) we shared, the thrill to win. They may feel angry, upset and very disappointed in me.”

Adolescents also spoke frequently of important socially defined person’s authority and duty towards others. Compared to childhood, when participants spoke mostly of their mother or family as the persons with authority, in adolescence, participants articulated well about ancestral, familial, societal and cultural values and wisdom as a source of moral disciplining. Adolescents referred to several significant others in their social networks who exemplified moral behavior. For example, an adolescent explained that “Since childhood I have been taught by my grandparents, parents and teachers that it is wrong to steal. Even the thought of it is wrong. I have been told many stories about my ancestors, or from the Ramayana and the Mahabharata where stealing is considered a sin and can only bring sorrow. These cultural values and rules have probably gone deep into my subconscious.” Another adolescent said, “Since childhood our

family teaches us that helping is important. So when I see the kitten I will naturally think of helping the kitten and my match won't seem as important then."

Children spoke of duty towards others including family, friends and other living beings such as animals. In adolescence, participants continued to speak of duty towards these significant others and in fact, expanded their realm of social obligations to include references to their duty as a team member and a good citizen of India. For example, one adolescent said, "As a good player and team member it is my *zimmedari* (responsibility) to reach on time, play and win for my team. I must go for the match." Another adolescent shared, "If I am a good citizen of India then I have to behave like one. I can't lie and deceive my own neighbors. I will tell them [that I broke the *Ganesh* idol by mistake]." The sentiment of duty towards animals also continued from childhood to adolescence. Invoking an indigenous concept, one adolescent exclaimed, "The kitten is also part of my society, right? So, it is my *kartavya* (duty) to ensure her safety and happiness!" Compared to childhood, participants in adolescence spoke more eloquently and in great detail about their duty as friends. Highlighting the sentiment of obligation in friendship, one adolescent said "My friends and I, we share a sorority bond. Friends are very important in my life, they are like family. I have grown up believing that. So I ought to help them and care for them in the best possible way." Another adolescent shared: "We spend almost 6 hours together in school every day, we rely heavily on friends for things that we may not even share with our parents. It can be lonely and depressing when you are in trouble and don't have a friend by your side. So it is first my duty to help my friend."

Majority Types within the Ethic of Divinity. As expected, there was a decrease in the degree of use of Divinity from childhood to adolescence. However, adolescent responses reflected a greater depth of meaning and employed a diverse set of divinity concepts in a way

that is distinct from childhood. Divinity reasoning in adolescence frequently employed God's Authority and Customary Traditional Authority (of spiritual/religious nature). Contrary to children's idea of God as a supreme authority that mainly punishes transgressions, a vast majority of adolescent responses suggest a broader and more accommodating view of God. Adolescent participants spoke not only of God but possibly a supernatural power that overlooks everyone, creates the world, manages its functioning, and ensures everyone's wellbeing. Here are two examples: "God exists. Or maybe a supernatural power exists… God is that power. That's why we don't see God. But I feel God and I believe in that superpower. Different people have named that power based on their religion", and "I am not sure of God but there is definitely a super power that makes sure we are taken care of, that our world is working well for us." This multifarious conceptualization of God in adolescence is indicative of mature/ adult-like understandings of God, as endorsed by the Hindu, Indian worldview. There were striking contrasts in the way children and adolescents spoke of their relationship with God. Unlike children, adolescents did not believe that God was merely a judge of our actions and transgressions. Instead, adolescent responses suggest that God was caring and considerate. Here are three of the many responses that highlight this developmental shift in this perceived dynamic between the self and God: "God is not cruel. God won't take offense for small mistakes that we make", "God is like our parents or our *guru* (teacher) who make sure that we are fed when hungry, that we are safe and happy. Parents eat after children have eaten. God won't mind that we tasted the *prashād* because God already knew we were hungry*",* and "I don't believe that God is a judge in a court, or that he punishes wrong behavior and rewards right behavior. God is kind and forgiving. God is understanding. God wants us to do well."

Like in childhood, participants in adolescence continued to speak of God being omnipotent and omnipresent. Speaking of the scenario about the kitten, one adolescent said "God is the ultimate creator of life and all things. God is in everything and God has an eye on everyone. Most people like me who believe in God are God-fearing. So we stay away from trouble and bad behavior. But there is nothing to worry about. We give our best and God gives us what is best for us. So God is watching and if I have seen the kitten in pain, I will help her for sure." In response to the scenario about stealing money, one adolescent said, "God is in everything and everyone! No one can lie in front of God, no one has the courage to do that. She should just say the truth at home."

Participants also explained their realities with a touch of humor: "I don't think God minds as much as my mom does! (Laughs) My mom is the one I am scared of. God understands. Small mistakes are okay once in a while, even God made mistakes", and "God knows my reality, but if I don't explain and tell the truth to my mom, to her it will seem like I have broken it [the Ganesha idol] on purpose. God won't do anything but I am afraid my mom will scold me!"

Additionally, adolescent responses highlight an emerging awareness of religious beliefs and values of themselves and others. For example, one adolescent claimed "I have not seen God but I believe in God or a certain power. Others may not. I am a religious person and so, I follow the beliefs and practices of my religion." Compared to childhood, participants in adolescence spoke frequently about the need to respect other's religious beliefs and values as well. Adolescent responses reflect a broadening of the adolescents' worldview, to accommodate multiple perspectives and secular/pluralistic beliefs about Divinity. One adolescence said, "They [the neighborhood] bought the idol because they were religious. According to our religion we cannot worship a *khandit* (broken) idol. If in their religion it is the same, then he should tell

everyone the truth. It is not God but the people who will be upset. He should not hurt religious sentiments and should apologize immediately." Another adolescent prioritized others' sentiments more than the idea of God, "I don't believe in God. But I know that my mother is deeply religious and believes in God. I respect her religious sentiments and would tell her the truth—that I couldn't resist and ate the *prashād*. I think she would appreciate the truth rather than committing what she would consider a *paap* (offering tasted food to God)."

Adolescents also expressed a more nuanced understanding of Hindu philosophy as it relates to the role of age in determining the consequences of moral transgressions. For example, one adolescent shares, "In my religion we are taught that all forms of life are precious. Still, if a child who is less than five years of age hurts an animal or person, he or she will be forgiven by God and by everyone else because they are little. Older children will be punished." Another adolescent explained, "In Hinduism we believe that a child less than 5 years of age is innocent and is a form of God and so, will not be punished by anyone, not even God. But if the child is older, they are expected to be mature and held accountable for their wrong doings."

Customary traditional authority (of spiritual/religious nature) was another major type of moral concept used in adolescence. Adolescents referred to several religious practices and traditions in their moral reasoning. For example, one adolescent said, "I am a Jain, I am deeply religious. At home we have strict rules and rituals about who can do puja, how and at what time of the day. We fast and we only first offer *prashād* to God and then eat. I am habituated to that because of my religion." Several participants used the indigenous term *apshagun* (something inauspicious) in their moral reasoning. Here are two examples: "In Hinduism, festivals and religious events are important for us. I am always careful around religious items and places. If the idol breaks during its tenure, or if the *prashād* falls on the floor and becomes dirty, or the

diyā (oil lamp) blows off, then they say it is *apshagun*—like a bad omen. A sign of something bad that's going happen", and "There are rituals that need to be followed for a reason and we must follow them. We have to pray and worship in a certain manner, otherwise it is *apshagun* (bad omen)."

Some adolescents also backed religious rituals with scientific explanations. For example, "It is actually not just because God wants it in a certain way or that our family wants it this way. These rituals are made for a reason. The food that we eat and offer to God or even others for that matter should be germ-free, if we play outside, come and touch the food the germs are likely to pass onto the food. We say *atithi devo bhava* (guests are a form of God). We should not touch the *prashād*, it won't just be offered to God, but to everyone else too. Why pass on germs?"

Virtues (Divinity-oriented) and other's physical wellbeing were other notable concepts used commonly by adolescents. Virtues within this ethic include attitudes or traits that pertain to a person's status as a transcendental being, or when the virtues pertain to traditions that have a divine basis (as compared to a familial or personal basis). Adolescent participants spoke of two major virtues within this ethic—(1) respect, and (2) gratitude. Speaking of respect towards all forms of life, one participant shared, "if I respect God then I will respect all human being and also all forms of life-- animals, insects, and trees." Adolescents frequently shared about a sense of gratitude towards life and God, for example: "We are fortunate that we got this life and we should always be thankful to God. In return we should do good things for others and stay away from lying, stealing, speaking badly about others etc. In that way we can say thanks to God."

Adolescents used other's physical wellbeing (body as God's temple) in their reasoning. Following are two typical responses: "A kitten is also a living being, it is sacred. Her poor soul is enduring pain. If I can lift off her pain and save her life then that is an opportunity that I won't

get again in life (unlike a match). I was there for a reason, I must save the kitten and relieve her from her suffering", and "Whoever worships god will believe that God's purity is in other human beings also, and all life forms. We have to remember that. We can't hit or cheat others otherwise it is like we are hitting or cheating God."

During adolescence, the substantial increase in the use of the above mentioned moral concepts corresponded with a decline in the use of punishment avoidance (from God). Compared to adolescents, children's moral discourse within this ethic largely focused on the use of punishment avoidance especially, the indigenous concept of *paap,* with the narrow understanding that *paap* was a form of punishment from God. For example, a child said, "If I steal someone's money then in the next birth God will make us poor and we won't have any money, God will punish us like that, God will give *paap.*" The possibility of punishment from God was therefore perceived as an important deterrent when faced with a moral dilemma in childhood but not so strongly in adolescence. Instead, adolescent responses show a wider array of moral concepts being invoked within the ethic of Divinity (as described above).

Summary of Results for Study 2

1. As expected, the degree of use of Autonomy increased in the course of adolescence. While Punishment Avoidance was a popular sub code used in childhood, virtues, conscience, psychological wellbeing and other individual's interest were emphasized in adolescence.
2. The degree of use of the Ethic of Community remained stable in childhood and adolescence, even while there was an increase in the variety of moral concepts employed in adolescence. These findings suggest that aspects of social membership, expectations

and obligations emerge early in Indian children's moral reasoning and remain important through adolescence, although the types of concepts used differ.

3. The use of the Ethic of Divinity was prominent by middle childhood and its use decreased in adolescence. While much of the reasoning in childhood was dominated by a concern for punishment avoidance from God, by adolescence customary traditional authority (of spiritual/religious nature), God's authority, virtues (divinity-oriented) and other's physical well-being gained prominence.

Study 3- Moral Reasoning among Adults in India: A Qualitative Study

The results of thematic analyses for the worldviews data are presented in three parts: (1) Personhood, (2) Ideas about God, and (3) Suffering.

1. Personhood

Are Humans by Nature Mostly Good or Bad? When asked whether people were, by nature, mostly good or bad, participants explained that people are not entirely good or bad but that one's *paristhiti* (circumstances), *māhol* (context), *sanskār* (familial or cultural upbringing) and *nazariyā* (perspective) determine one's actions and decisions. One participant gave the example of Sanjay Dutt, a famous Bollywood actor convicted of the 1993 Mumbai bombings: "No one intentionally wants to do wrong. For example Sanjay Dutt—is he good or bad? If he was good, he should do good at all times, right? How did he do wrong things? Is he bad? No! His *paristhiti* (circumstances) changed. His decisions and behavior were in response to a change in his circumstances." Another adult participant shared "One's *sanskār* (beliefs and practices repeated in upbringing) governs our actions and thoughts. But even that is subjective. My *sanskār* may say that truth is above all. Another person's *sanskār* may say that family is above all so to protect their family, they may bribe or even lie."

Participants also spoke of several good and bad qualities in people (see Figure 11). Descriptions of goodness in persons included a genuine concern for care and happiness of others along with a helping nature. For example, one participant shared a personal experience to explain goodness in her neighbor: "I had two children at home and I had to take my husband to the hospital. My new neighbor decided to help me by taking care of my children while I stayed at the hospital for three days. She works and has children. But for those three days she managed to help me no matter what. She made sacrifices for me. Someone like her who steps up to help in times

of crisis has to be a very good, generous person from within. They want to spread happiness and not sadness." In contrast, participants shared bad characteristics such as being *swārthi* or selfish and harboring bad intentions for others. Lastly, personhood was judged as good or bad based on the performance of one's duties and responsibilities in everyday life. Speaking of this, participants explained "If our upbringing is good and our morals are strong then we will do our duties well. Goodness comes in everything that we do well in our daily life", and "A teacher should teach well, and a student should study well. If we are true to our professions and responsibilities in everyday life then that is the ultimate form of goodness."

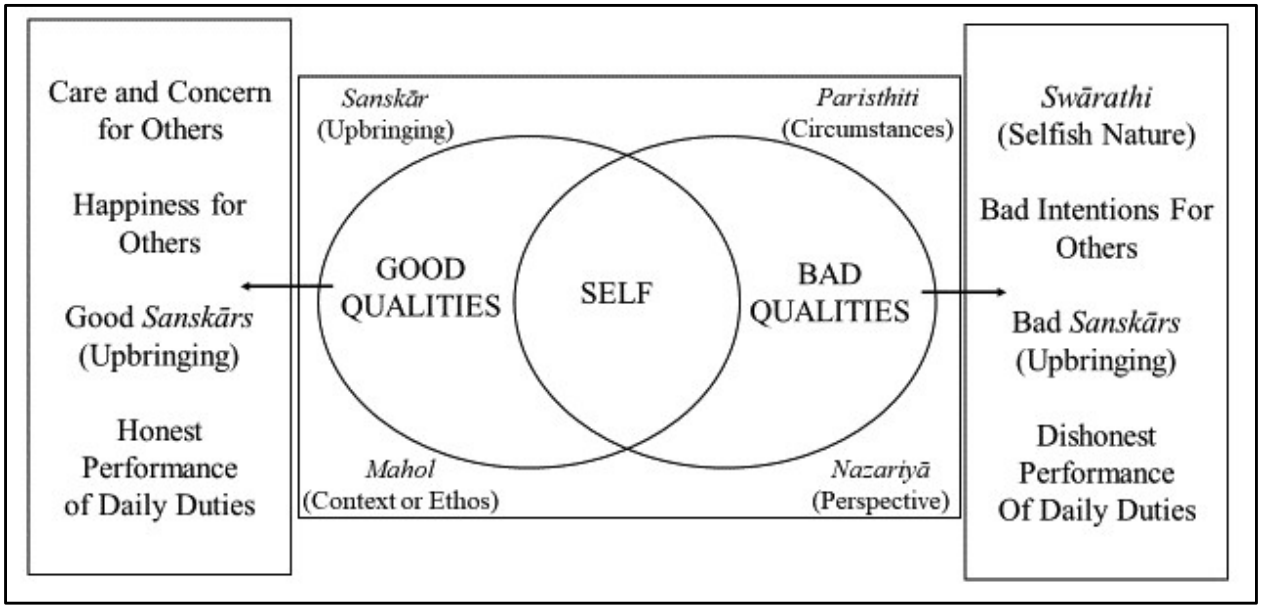
As shown in Figure 11, the self was seen as constituting both good and bad qualities. Explaining this view, one participant shared: "Good and bad tendencies are in everyone. No one is perfectly good or bad. It is also true that I maybe generally good to everyone and still, something about me is seen as wrong by the other person. It is a matter of *nazariyā* (perspective). It is very subjective." Another explained: "The self can evolve and change with time and circumstances. It is possible to work on strengthening good qualities and controlling bad qualities like anger, jealousy and laziness. But these qualities don't define a person as good or bad. All of us have a mix of good and bad qualities after all."

Therefore, goodness or badness in a person was not seen as a fixed or absolute part of human nature. However, the emphasis was on circumstances, contexts and repeated conditioning in one's upbringing (*sanskār)* which determines individual response. Good *sanskārs* inculcated within the family context enabled an individual to understand and act in accordance with one's role and responsibilities in different life stages.

The following section presents an analysis of participants' understanding of gender as an aspect of personhood.

Figure 11

Selfhood and Perceptions of God and Bad Qualities



Ideas about Gender: Are Men and Women Mostly the Same or Different? Thematic analyses for adult responses to the question of similarities and differences between men and women revealed three major themes - (1) Women and men as equal, (2) Women and men as different, and (3) Women and men as equal-but-different. Table 6 presents the three themes and the percentage of responses that represent them.

Results show that both men and women spoke of similarities between the two genders. Participants shared that men and women have the same intellect and potentials. For example, a male participant said that "Everything that can be done by men can also be done by women." A female participant explained, "In today's times when both men and women are equally qualified and career-oriented, they have the same capabilities." Participants also spoke of shared values. One participant said "Men and women have the same values when it comes to raising children. We are both thankful for our children, we want to set a good example for them to have good morals, to be a *sanskāri nāgarik* (a well-cultured citizen)."

Table 6

Responses of Men and Women as Equal, Different and Equal-but-Different (in percentages).

	Women	Men
Equal		
Intellect and Potentials	48.1	51.9
Values	58.2	56.8
Responsibility of the Family	59.1	56.9
Different		
Emotions and Temperament	55.3	54.7
Thoughts and Priorities	82.3	17.7
Gender Socialization	48.1	51.9
Roles & Responsibilities	32.8	67.2
Equal-but-Different		
Same Responsibility, Different Role Performance	71.9	28.1
Same Potentials, Different Outcomes	41.1	58.9

Responsibility towards the family was also a major recurring theme across the interviews. Men and women spoke extensively about their shared *jawābdāri* (responsibility) towards their family. Here are three of the many examples: "There may be other responsibilities but when it comes to the family, it is a joint responsibility for sure"; "Don't they say- *do dil, ek jaan* (two hearts, one soul)? There will be many highs and lows, decisions and challenges for a married couple and so, it is teamwork. The couple works as a unit to fulfil all responsibilities of the family"; and "Mutual adjustments and sacrifices—both men and women are responsible for the family's health and happiness."

While adult participants often spoke of a joint responsibility of the family as described above, there were prominent differences perceived in the actualization of this responsibility. Women participants explained how the idealistic view of equal responsibility seldom translates into shared role performance in reality. One woman shared, "Both are responsible for the family and its needs but when it comes to actually doing things, women do a lot more. Men make

decisions and contribute financially but women execute the responsibilities." Highlighting the hold of strong gender stereotypes, one woman shared, "When my children have exams, I postpone all my outings and commitments to stay with them and care for them. It isn't the same with my husband. He goes ahead with the same routine- work, meetings, and movies with friends. The primary responsibility for the children is mine." Men in the study affirmed this stereotype by reporting that while the responsibility for the family is shared, roles and responsibilities are different for men and women (see Table 6).

In fact, only the men asserted that long-standing traditions of patriarchy created in the family and society make 'equality' an impossibility in the absolute sense. Therefore, they shared the view that men and women are equal- but- different. Even with the increasing education and employment of women, the male participants explained that the roles of women are only multiplying, as they are thrust with the expectation to manage work, family and the household. Therefore, men and women share the same responsibility for the family, but differ in role performance. For example, "Today more women are educated and employed than in the past. Working is secondary, it is not necessary for them to work, but their role as a mother is the most important." Another man explained, "Both of us have the family's *jawābdāri* or responsibility. But our society has created a system of role distribution, our ancestors have shown us that men and women have different roles. It is for the benefit of the family, not something that can change easily."

While adult men showed resistance to change, women expressed a pressing need to acknowledge women's role overload. Explaining the crisis experienced by working women, a participant shared, "Being a working woman is added strain in India, because I still have to

manage my children's routines, family needs, from maids to colleagues, I have to do it all. We have progressed as a nation but husbands still don't contribute in child care and home chores."

Both adult men and women in the study explain that early gender socialization in families lays the foundation for gender stereotypes. One female participant shared, "I am not saying that women are better than men, but they definitely think one step ahead of men. And that's only because of the way they are brought up. Girls are taught to be like their mothers—to take care of the home, to look out for others, their needs and feelings. That's how they grow up to be. Boys remain *bindaas* (carefree), they are taken care of." A male participant explains, "I am not saying that men and women are not equal. But society teaches them different roles. So for example, a father can't put a child to sleep or feed the child like a mother does. The child will not get *santosh* (satisfaction). It is naturally like that."

Therefore, even after education, health and career opportunities are at par for both genders, the outcomes seem to differ tremendously. A woman shared that no matter what, the differences will remain, "In childhood we give everything to our sons and daughters equally. But after marriage the girl's everything is set aside. Education, career, sometimes even the name is changed. Then when kids come into the picture, that's a second barrier, and a barrier only because there is no support. Employers won't give leave (maternity), and now families are smaller. So differences are here to stay even after equal education and opportunity."

Safeguarding Family Harmony and Wellbeing: Uncompromisable Goals. While discussing similarities and differences between men and women, participants spoke of three major family goals shared by both genders (see Figure 12). Participants explained these family goals in light of their duties. First, they spoke of their *dharma* towards their families and their crucial role in the lives of loved ones who depended on them for basic needs. These duties of a

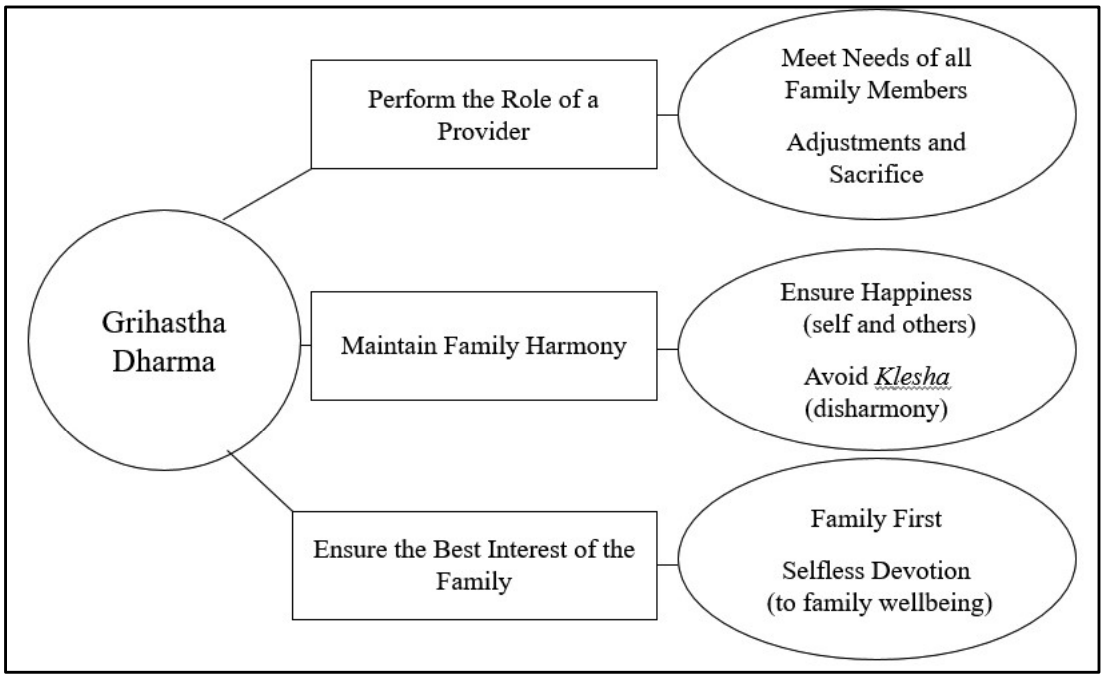
householder in adulthood constitute *grihastha dharma*. Highlighting the need for the married couple to function as one strong unit to provide for significant others, a participant shared, "If our unit is not strong, how will we support those who depend on us for their needs? We have children, elderly parents and also an active career." Participants reflected on their role as the provider of a variety of resources—both material and emotional, which can be met through the fulfilment of their responsibilities. For example, a participant shared, "increasingly I feel like I am there more for others than for myself. It gives me a lot of satisfaction to be able to fulfil my responsibilities." Participants also spoke of the needs for adjustments and sacrifices on part of the married couple, to ensure that the focus remains on meeting family needs. For example, "At the end of the day a couple will do what is best for their family. They will also set aside their own agendas, needs or problems. So if my wife or I need to be there for our aging parents or our children then we will be there. That's the first thing we will do. We feel happy to know that we are responsible for them and that we are able to provide for them."

Secondly, participants, especially women spoke of their *dharma* to ensure happiness, togetherness in the family and to avoid conflict. A prominent response that explained this aspect of *grihastha dharma* was—"There should be no *klesha* (disharmony) in the family. We have to learn to resolve conflict without vengeance, suffering and guilt. Happiness of the family is most important. If one member is unhappy, the whole family's happiness is affected." Drawing attention to one's own state of happiness and its impact on others, a participant explained: "What matters is that you make others happy and that you too are happy. So instead of I, me, mine, we should see others-- see whether your spouse, kids and parents are happy. We all have to be together and be happy together."

Lastly, participants asserted that men and women ultimately do what is in the best interest of the family and its wellbeing. This emerged as the basic responsibility during adulthood for the participants. As one participant explained: "At the end of the day we are together and making our family grow together. Because family always comes first." Another shared: "These are today's challenges for men and women. Both need to manage earnings, relationships and the family that depends on them. They will ultimately have to let go of their stubbornness, and think for their family's happiness instead. Both will have to sacrifice something for the children. So they will have to do what's best for the family to be intact. Once a person becomes selfish then the marriage will end, the family that depends on them will be affected, relationships will be forever suffer and that's not good for anyone. So they will have to find a way that works best for them to be together."

Figure 12

Three Aspects of Grihastha Dharma as Perceived by Adult Participants



2. Ideas about God

What is God?

All adult participants shared their belief that God exists. They described God's existence in three prominent ways: 1) as a super power, 2) as *shakti* (cosmic energy), and 3) as an interface between the self and its divine components (see Figure 13). When speaking of God as a superpower, one adult shared that "God is the ultimate power that has the capacity to take care of everyone and everything in this universe. Definitely a super power, *advitiya* (like none other)." Highlighting the fluidity of the idea of God, a participant said, "There is definitely a superpower—you may call it God or whatever you like. Our belief is that this superpower makes everything work."

Adults also spoke of God as *shakti* or cosmic energy. For example, "I keep *shraddhā* in Sai Bābā*,* you may believe in Jesus and someone else may have faith in Allāh. These are only different names we give to the same *shakti* (cosmic energy) that surrounds us, and governs us as well as the functioning of the world around us." Adults also explained about the nature of *shakti* and why God is a term that is used more commonly: "When we think of God as an energy, it seems so abstract and distant, not everybody can associate with it. So we use words like God or even more specifically Krishna, Ganesh etc.", and "We often fall short of the vocabulary to explain what that powerful energy is in its entirety. But when we say God we have a common understanding of what we mean. God-- this term perhaps would have come up because there was a need for people to share a common belief."

While participants spoke of God as a superpower or *shakti,* they spoke of this superpower or energy or God as constituted within themselves. Here are some of the many responses that assert this understanding: "We talk about God because we need something concrete to worship and relate to. Otherwise in reality it is our inner self. That's the only superpower that exists",

"This energy is within us, not external…and it is always positive, always bright. No matter what is happening on the outside, even if bad, you will always find your spiritual peace and balance with this positive energy", "This energy is a constant within us and is available to us. To be able to connect to it we need a clear conscience, and a positive state of mind", and "If you believe in yourself, have a positive mind and see good in your own self, then you have the confidence to be good to others and to see good in others. So that is also a way of worshipping or believing in God. Don't we say- *aham brahmasmi* (I am Brahman or the ultimate reality)*?* And we also say *atithi devo bhava* (guests are equivalent to God)*.* So God is really in me and you and everything that exists."

Further, adults asserted that God is a belief that stems from a positive outlook towards life, firmly rooted in *shraddhā* or the faith in a superpower that deeply cares for people and their wellbeing. One adult explained "After all, what is God? It is a belief! *Maano toh Shankar, na maano toh kankar!* (If you believe, it is *Shankar,* if not, it is a pebble!) Even a *shivlinga* is a stone after all, no one told us it is God in real. It is a matter of belief, *shraddhā,* or faith. Our forefathers laid down principles and practices to uphold *shraddhā* as a source of positive hope." Speaking of the relation between the inner self and the mind, participants spoke at length about the positive influence of *shraddhā* (Figure 16, p.70)*.* For example, one participant said, "You may give it (superpower) any name. What is important is that you keep *dridha shraddhā* or strong faith. Your *shraddhā* will give you hope and strength in the most challenging times. Ultimately it is your mind that speaks to your inner self and determines your actions or responses in the outer world." Another participant shared: "*Shraddhā* towards God is what gives us hope. It is a reminder to look forward to life and everything that comes with it—the good and the bad. A

healthy, happy mind develops through faith in God and is a source of positive energy. Every morning we should start our day feeling thankful to be alive and enjoy what comes our way."

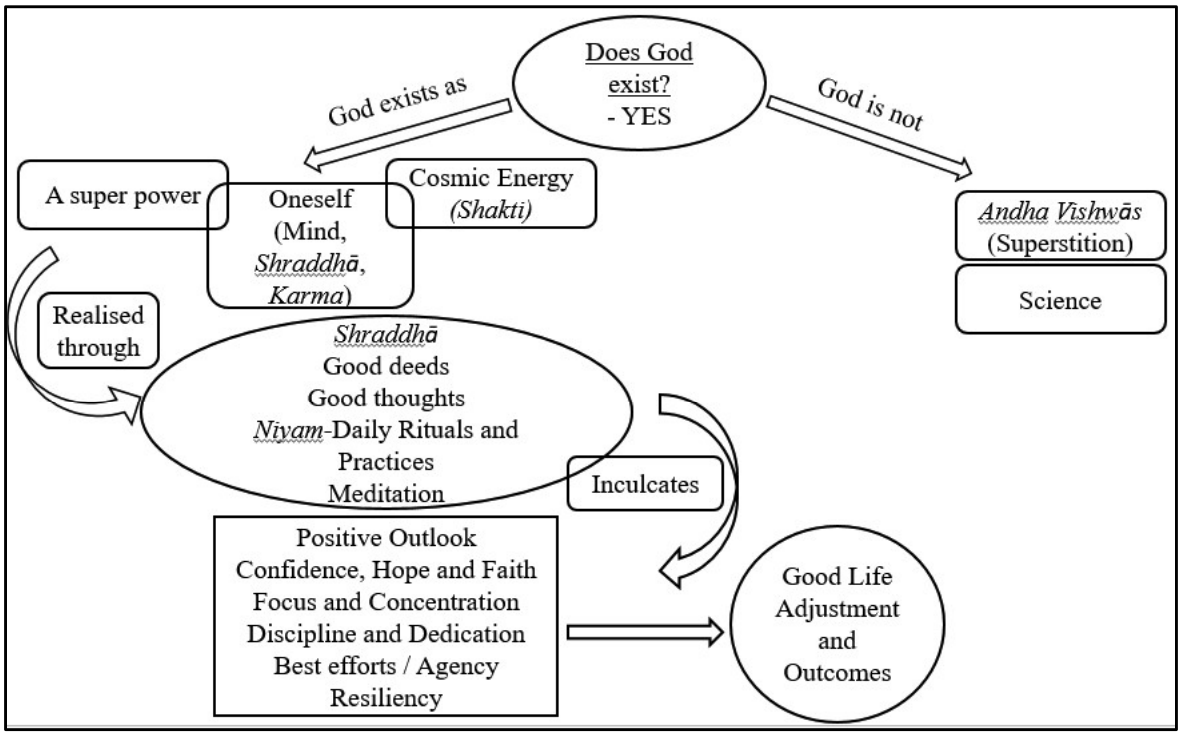
Several responses highlight the benefits of *shraddhā: "*With *shraddhā,* through meditation you will be able to develop better concentration. That's why we use an idol, picture or even a mental image of God. Otherwise our mind keep wavering. Even by just focusing your attention on the center of your forehead, between your eyebrows you will be able to learn concentration, focus and dedication." Participants highlighted the role of *shraddhā* in inculcating a way of life that was adaptive, suited for success and resiliency: "The belief in God teaches us discipline and a way to work well in life by doing everyday things slowly, systematically and mindfully. Not in a *hadbad* (hustle). What I have learnt over the years is that it helps to keep *shraddhā*. It takes you on the right path, teaches you good virtues like hard work, honesty and humility", and "If you have *shraddhā* in anyone or anything, it could be work or a relationship, that is God for you. That God will give you immense *shakti.* When you pray for guidance and strength in difficult times, like when I am feeling defeated, I pray and my belief in God helps me overcome fear, gather strength and do what needs to be done."

Karma was another aspect of the self that participants brought up. When asked about whether they believed in God or not, several participants explained that much of their life, including people, events, and outcomes were a consequence of past deeds or *karma.* For example, "In reality, it is all about my efforts and my conscience. If I do well, I get good results. We believe God has blessed us with a good life or reward but that's not it. More than God it is my *punya-karma ke dush-karma* (good deeds or bad deeds) and that of my *purvaj* (ancestors) as well. We have to bear the consequences—enjoy life or suffer accordingly." Referring to the Hindu epic *Mahabharata*, one participant explained: "When lying on the death bed (made of

arrows), *Bhishma Pitāmaha* asked *Krishna* 'I have seen all these 72 *janmas* (births). I have never done anything wrong. I don't know why I have to face this misery', to which *Krishna* asked *Bhishma* to go back through the 72 *janmas* to a time when he was a young child, playing in the mud. *Krishna* reminded *Bhishma* of the time he had taken a thorn and poked an innocent caterpillar for no reason but his own *buri manshā* (ill intention). With that one act, and others, explained Krishna, when all our *punya* is exhausted, we are punished. I have also seen this in my own family, that maybe not today or tomorrow, but we will definitely get the consequence in future births. So this is not God punishing me, right? This is all my doing. I am repenting because of my *kukarma* (wrong doing)." On a similar note, another participant shared an explanation with a more contemporary example: "We keep wondering about corrupt politicians—how come they are doing such wrong things and still enjoying life! Let me tell you, they are doing alright because of their ancestors' good *karma. Karma phal* (the fruits of your deeds) can be experienced today or tomorrow, in this birth or another, and by you or the coming generations, a hundred percent! They have chosen the wrong way of living life. But this is how *karma* works, it has its own mechanism."

Figure 13

Beliefs about God's Existence among Indian Adults



What is God not?

Apart from ideas about God, adult participants also clarified their stance on what God was not (see Figure 13). First, participants warned against believing in *andha vishwās* (superstition) in daily living. For example, one participant exclaimed, "Have faith, but not blind faith! The two are very different but easily confused." Other participants explained: "It is better to stay away from *andha vishwās* or superstition. It takes you on the wrong path, can never lead to happiness or solution to problems." Participants also explained the difference between daily rituals and superstitions. For example, one adult said, "They say that after six pm you should not light the *diyā* (oil lamp). It is a discipline, a daily ritual that we don't miss. The *diyā* will not be lit after six pm. There is no reason except that there should be some *niyam* (discipline) and punctuality in life. These rituals teach us just that. Nothing will happen if you miss one day—

when people say you will get *paap*, it will be *apshagun*, something horrible will happen, that is all superstition. No God or superpower is sitting, waiting for us to do wrong so they can give us *paap"*, and "In the morning it is said that during *brahmamuhurtha* (auspicious time of the day to begin routine activities; also a good time for *dhyāna* or meditation) you should do *pujā* (worship). Why? Because then you will start your day early and won't sleep in till 8am! These simple practices in daily living go a long way, they teach you the benefits of *niyam*, discipline."

Participants also spoke of science when describing God. One participant said, "There has to be some superpower or energy that makes everything work the way it does. Otherwise we would have been able to relate everything to science. We are still unable to find solutions for many questions, explanations for phenomena which are mysterious and unanswered even by famous scientists." Another participant explained, "They still can't tell us which part of the brain is the *mann* or mind**.** Can they tell us how humans can live for 200-300 years? They can create artificial hearts and body parts but can they generate the whole spectrum of human emotions or feelings in a heart? There are still things beyond our comprehension that the super power has created or at least is informed about."

God's Characteristics: What is God Like? (Personality, Form and Gender)

Adults gave detailed descriptions of characteristics of God with great ease (see Figure 14). They attributed several personality traits, such as, "*Bhagwan shānt ane bholā che* (God is calm and innocent)", "God takes care of us (*aapdi sambhaad raakhe).* God doesn't force or control us. Because of our belief in God, we always try and do well in life, stay away from bad *karma* (deeds)", and "God will always wish for our good, never have ill-will. God is full of positivity, we have to tap onto it. If things are not going well, it is because God wants us to be stronger and to work harder for our own good."

Participants also described God as omnipresent and omnipotent: “God is aware of every moment of our lives, God is everywhere. God knows our present, past and the future. Nothing misses God’s awareness”, and “God is the ultimate power that exists! There is nothing more powerful than God, not even the nuclear bomb! For example, I believe that nature is a form of God, and nature is definitely more powerful than us humans.”

When responding to the question of God’s characteristics, all participants highlighted the fluid nature of God’s form and gender. For example, one participant explained “(God has) no form. Again it is our thoughts, how we visualize God. We have made images to give us a way to connect with god in our minds, in our thoughts and imagination but there is no fixed form.” Another participant asserted: “There is no single form of God. We give the idea of God as Krishna, like a human. But in reality it can be anything, even a stone. It is all about *shraddhā*. But God is formless.”

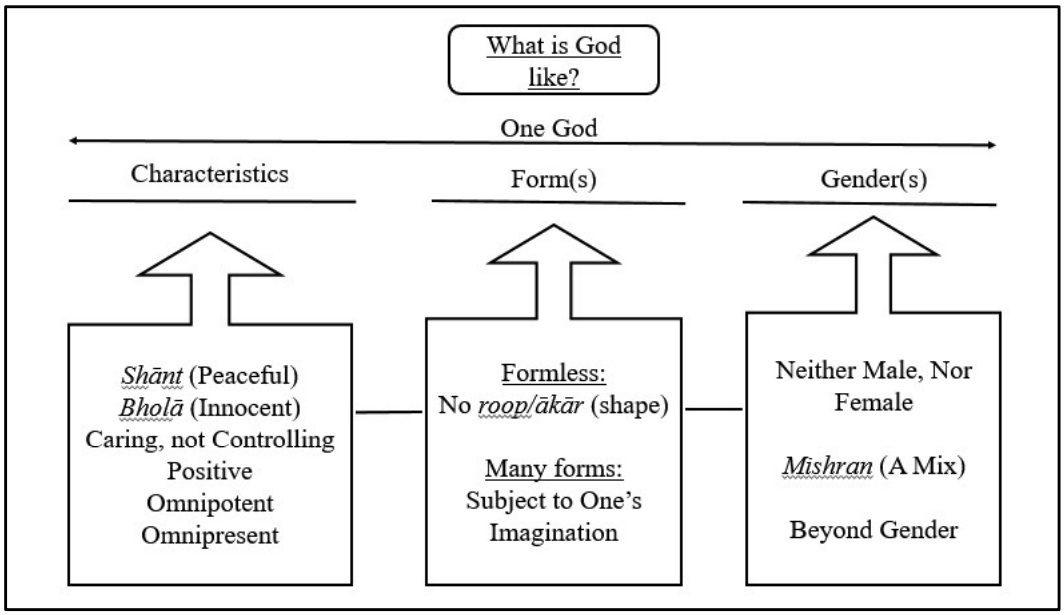
Participants used this belief and conviction of a formless God to explain that there is only one God even while there could be different forms represented by different religions, or even by different communities within a religion (for instance, Hinduism). Here are a few of the many responses from adult participants: “We are all humans, our names are different but we are all the same. Similarly, there is only one God, only names are different. Who even sees the *roop* (features)? God is a belief, an idea. Your Ram maybe overweight, mine may be slimmer, it all depends on the imagination of the artist who has painted or sculpted God; or it is our imagination. But our God is still the same! So even their *roop* doesn’t matter really”, “God doesn’t have a form, it is all *shraddhā.* After all, a *shivalinga* is a stone but everyone worships because of *shraddhā*. If tomorrow morning two people say that *Hanumanji* had appeared in the middle of the road last night, then what will happen? Two more people will come and put

flowers there, performed *aarti* and start believing that as true. This is also *shraddhā*—just the faith in God", and "[There is] only one God. We celebrate Christmas, Eid and Diwali of course. We have a different name for God but for God we all are same, like that for us also all forms of gods are different but God is the same." Participants asserted the idea that idols, pictures and sculptures of God were only a concrete form of representing the superpower to develop a deep connection. For example, one participant shared "I worship all Gods in the form of Sāi Bābā because it is easier to visualize and to relate to. Till I am able to reach the level at which I can directly relate to a power or energy that I cannot really see but I can connect to, I will need some concrete version like an idol, it really helps me."

When asked about whether God had a certain gender most participant shared the belief that "No, there is nothing like male or female. It is how you imagine your God to be." Other adults ascribed both genders to God: "I believe there is a man in every woman and a woman in every man so even in God, it has to be a *mishran* (mix) of the genders" and "It seems to me that God can be both male and female, why not? We worship *Ambe mā* and *Durgā mā* in *Navarātri*. We worship *Ganeshji* during *Ganeshchaturthi* and *Shankar bhagwān* in *Mahā* Shivarātri. But a male God is what comes first to mind when we say God. Whereas when we say *shakti*, we think of *Devi.* And from mythological stories we know that in all the stories the male Gods made mistakes and the female goddesses corrected those mistakes. So then God can be both genders and more, why not? Together they are an energy. For example, *Shankar's* aggression-- when it is beyond anyone's control, it is only his wife Pārvati who is able to control his anger." One participant clarified: "Doesn't matter male or female, animal, human or formless. God is this superpower that's beyond gender and these classifications!"

Figure 14

Characteristics, Form(s) and Gender(s) Attributed to God



What Aspects of Your Life are Controlled or Independent of God?

When asked about whether God controls any part of them or their lives, participants responded by first asserting that God governs everything related to birth and death (see Figure 15). For example, one participant mentioned: "When a child is born, it is a happy event and when we experience death we feel immense loss. In both (events) we feel powerless—as if there is definitely a super power that governs the birth and death of an individual." However, when probed further, they gave elaborate explanations of how in every other aspect of life, one's agency and *karma* had significant influence: "God knows I won't leave everything to God, my efforts and hard work will matter a lot. God makes us *saksham* (capable). The belief in God keeps me strong. But it is my hard work that will matter the most. If the result of my hard work is good, I thank God. If it is not good, and I fail for example, I still thank God because it would have been much worse if God wasn't there for me." Participants frequently spoke of the role of destiny when discussing the relationship between faith in God, self and *karma*: "I believe in

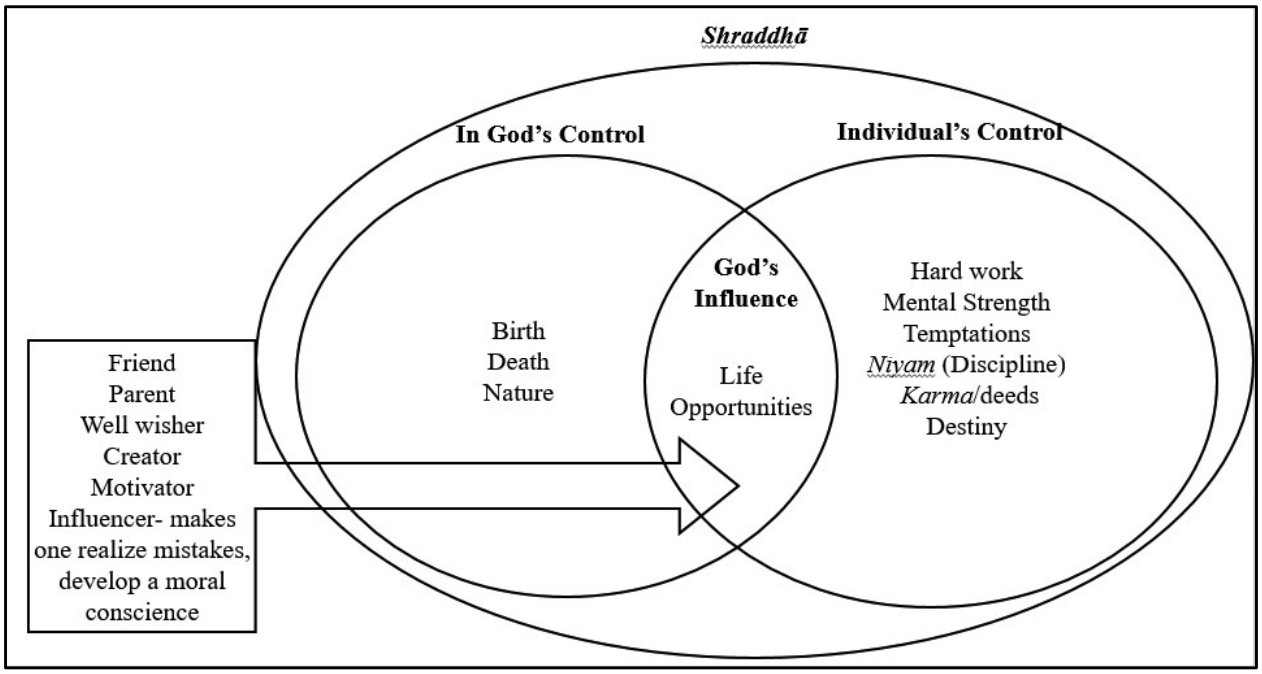
bhāgya (destiny). I believe that God is fully aware of our destiny but God doesn't control or manage it. We have more to do with our destiny than God. It's not that God decides 'Niyati, you will become a cardiologist' and just by sitting, doing nothing you will become a cardiologist! Everything good happens for a reason, everything bad happens for a reason. Your efforts are important, not optional. The belief in God will give you the strength and confidence to achieve your goals and dreams, and to work hard. So first and foremost, you are responsible to realize your destiny." Participants frequently spoke of gratitude towards God: "I can't see the whole picture but I believe that God can. God knows my destiny and so, when something bad happens, I think of God, I pray with the belief that God is with me in my difficult time and this helps me be patient and move on with life. For example, if at work, a good, trained employee decides to leave my company, I will definitely feel the loss. But I may later realise that this happened to be good for me because the new employee that was hired turned out to have other strengths that the company could benefit from! So God helps you move past disappointments and helps you look at the brighter side of life", and "Like, if I meet with an accident and lose my leg, I can curse everyone responsible for the accident or be mad at the doctors, nasty with my family members or I can be thankful to God for the fact that I survived and with God's blessings, I can work towards building a good life for myself."

Therefore, God was seen not as a controller but a supporter and a good influence on our moral choices and behaviors. One participant explained that "Your belief in God or a superpower will influence your actions and thoughts. You do well, you think you are blessed by God. You do badly, you will think of God punishing you. But it is ultimately you who decides what your actions will be. You decide and perform your *karma."* Other participants explained how God can influence your conscience: "I do believe that God is guiding me in whatever I do and whatever

path I take. When I think about god, I think of whether my actions or decisions will be permissible by God. Belief in God helps you work towards what is morally good", and "We think God gives *paap* but in reality it is all about our mind. The belief in a superpower like God makes us conscientious. If we do wrong it pinches our conscience, induces guilt. We think God gave *paap* but in reality it is our *Karma*, what we did."

Figure 15

Control, Influence and the Many Roles of God for Human Life



The Different Roles of God in Human Life

While participants explained that God was not a controller but a confidante, they also perceived God's presence in their lives through a spectrum of human roles (see Figure 15). Specifically, adults spoke of God(s) as parents, children, guests, neighbors, friends, and teachers. For example, one participant shared that "I always felt that my parents are my god because they used to take care of me they used to always be there whenever I needed them they used to always protect me-- that's what God does! God also punishes you, not only because you did wrong but

because they want you to learn, so it is out of love. My parents used to do the same and now when my parents are no more, I consider God as my parents." Another participant explained: "God wants to bring out the best in us, make us our best version—very much like our parents think for us, right? So God is like our parents." Another common response drew parallels between children and God: "We see God in every child. Children, for us, are a form of God. They are precious, innocent, they give us joy and happiness, they are to be cared for—both children and God, they are very similar in my mind."

Several participants also expressed a trusting, affable bond between themselves and God. Here are two of the many examples: "God is someone I can relate to, I can share my joys, fears, and worries. By sharing with God I am able to think through problems and bring solutions. When I accomplish something I have worked hard for, I thank God, Similarly, when I am unhappy, God is the first to know from me. God is close to me, always there for me just like a true friend",

Apart from the specific roles mentioned above, participants extended this belief in God to the general other. For example: "Guests are a form of God for us, *atithi devo bhava* (Guests are like God) and actually all others are, like even neighbors, right? We keep cordial relations with others because when we need help—big or small—like in emergencies or even daily routine, we are all cordial and connected, and it is good."

Is there an Antithesis* of God*?

As explained in the previous sections, participants described God as a positive energy, one that is helpful, caring and forgiving—who wants us to prosper and do well. When asked if there is an evil force/energy or devil that contrasts God, all participants refuted the idea: "There is nothing like a devil or evil force. In any case, if God is by your side nothing is more powerful (than God). You will be able to face all challenges if you have faith in God." Some participants

entertained the idea of an evil force but quickly moved on to explain that such a force only exists in our own selves. For example, one participant elaborated: "It is very natural for us to think like Newton, that every action has an equal and opposite reaction. We say every coin has two sides. Every word has antonyms. So we think there has to be something that is the opposite of God and very conveniently we can blame our misfortunes or misdeeds on that opposite force or thing. But that's not how it is. What is good and what is bad is existing in me. Whichever becomes dominant in me-- that is what I am. If good qualities become dominant in me then I am a good person if I let evil thoughts and bad qualities take over, then I will be bad. So it is what I make myself-- what I do would make me good or bad as a person." Other participants explained a similar understanding and explained with reference to Rāvana (the chief antagonist in *Mahābhārata*): "Rāvana was also a learned scholar, he was a Brāhmin after all. But his pride and bad deeds made him evil. So Rāvana is responsible for his evilness, it is in us to be good or bad", and "Rāvana worshipped Shiva. Shiva is the God of destruction, right? We believe in God as Brahmā (creator) and also Shivā (destroyer). You will notice that Shivā is portrayed as benevolent as well as someone in rage and on a rampage. He is shown to slay demons and also meditate calmly on the mountains. So we are also similar, our life gives challenges, but it also gives us this opportunity to maintain a balance-- it is up to us to be conscious about how we behave."

More specifically, participants pointed to the organic linkages between one's self, mind, and *shraddhā* or belief in God (see Figure 16). For example, highlighting the role of the mind, one participant explained: "It all depends on how you think-- if you think positive and if you believe that God is with you, then you will strive to do the right thing, you will work hard, be honest, and you will also feel good about yourself. You become a source of positive energy or

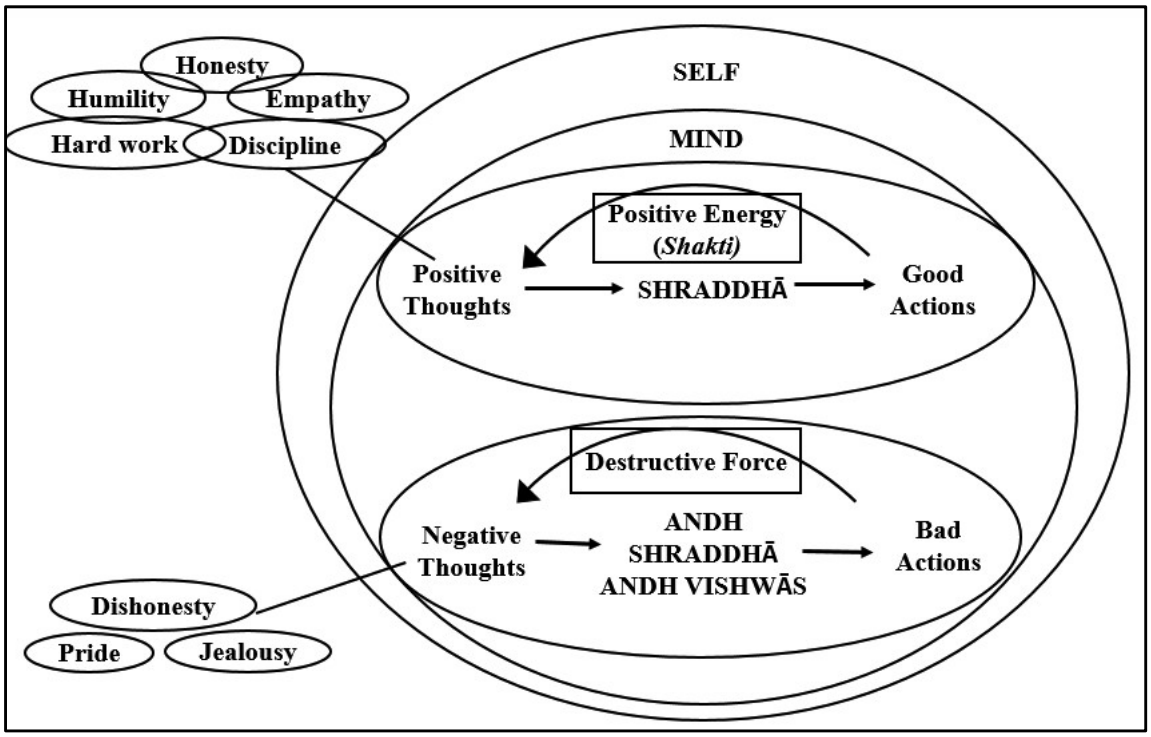
shakti. If you are scared, jealous, and allow yourself to be overpowered by negative thoughts, then I think that is the bad side of a person. That is the evil side then and it leads to negative behavior, if not controlled it can ruin your life. But ultimately it is totally me, my mind and my belief in God."

Another participant elaborated on similar lines: "Our mind wavers between two extreme possibilities when we have a decision to make-- if I do this, this will happen and if I do otherwise then that will happen. That is why *shraddhā* in God is important. You have to first believe in yourself, that only good will happen if you give your best efforts. With that positive mind, you will generate positive energy that will help you do good *karma* only. If you keep *shraddhā* in the complete sense (*poori tarah se*) then you must have heard that movie dialogue, right? That *agar kisi cheez ko dil se chaaho to puri kayanat usey tumse milane ki koshish mein lag jaati hai* (If you genuinely wish for something with all your heart then the entire universe works to make it possible for you)." While participants spoke of positive outcomes from a positive mind, they also attributed negative outcomes to a mind overpowered by negative thoughts: "Our mind will always get a mix of good and bad thoughts. When negative thoughts come and you are unable to let go of them, for example if I feel jealous for a neighbor and if I keep thinking and talking ill about them to the extent that I am unable to see anything good in them then that will create a negative destructive force in me and will spoil my relationship with my neighbors and also negatively influence my personality, my behavior, my *karma*."

Finally, participants asserted that even if there was a devil or evil force contrasting God, it cannot be equivalent to God: "What a positive mind or energy can do, a negative force or mind can never do."

Figure 16

The Interface of the Self, Mind and Shraddhā



3. Suffering and Self-Refinement

For the last part of the interview, participants responded to the following questions and probes related to suffering: (1) All people suffer at some point in life. Why do you think there is suffering? (2) Do you think suffering serves any purpose? Does it have a meaning? And (3) If all suffering could be eliminated, would that be alright? The model that emerged from participant responses is depicted in Figure 17 (p. 74).

Participants explained suffering as a consequence of bad *karma*. For example, "Suffering is the bad result of bad deeds (*bure kaam ka bura natijā*). If you do wrong then at some point, in some way you will get its *parinām* (result or consequence)", and "I think in a rational way-- you did bad at some point and so, you will suffer the consequences."

They spoke of the relationship between suffering and *karma* on a continuum of present, past and future lives, i.e. bad *karma* in the present life could have unfavorable implications in the present birth and future births. Here are two examples from participant responses: "Our deeds have direct consequences and they reflect in our everyday experiences", and "You suffer based on your actions in the past life. If you did well in this life as a human, you will enjoy your next life. The fact that you take birth again is also a form of suffering but it is all relative. It is better than being born as an animal, for example, or in more unfortunate circumstances. If you did more bad deeds than good then you will be born again, and in that future life you will have to suffer because of your bad actions in your previous birth."

While participants spoke of suffering to be an individual's personal journey, they also described it as having a peripheral influence on one's significant others such as present family and future generations: "Your suffering is purely on account of your misdeeds, or your wrong choices or judgments or because you didn't do what you ought to do", and "*Aapda purvajo na khotta karmo na phal aapde bhogva pade, parivar ae bhogva pade* (we and our family have to bear the bad consequences of our ancester's bad *karma*). That is why we need to live life responsibly. It is no joke. We need to be more conscientious in all that we do. We hear so much about keeping our environment clean so that our future generations benefit from a clean environment—it is exactly like that. Our actions will have their effect on our future generations, even spiritually." Therefore, participants avoided bad *karma* so that the next generation does not suffer.

Four forms of suffering were outlined using participant responses. Table 7 shows examples as given by participants in their responses.

Table 7

Forms of Suffering in Adult's Moral Reasoning

Sr. No.	Form of Suffering	Verbatim Examples
1.	Physical	People suffer physically. Aging for example if a form of suffering because there comes a time in everyone's life when your body and mind are aging, and you are not the same as before. How you age, what ailments you have or don't have are all part of suffering and so are medical ailments and impairments.
2.	Psycho-Relational	Suffering is also when you don't have a network of close family and friends. Loneliness can be a punishment of sorts. (It is) very difficult… you don't want to feel alone in this world. And sometimes you have your entire family living with you, and still you suffer because no one likes you or no one understands you, there are only fights. It is ultimately a personal, intimate experience.
3.	Financial	If I am not doing too well financially, it's not because I didn't give money to a beggar or something. It is because I didn't work hard enough, I probably made bad decisions for my business to fail. That's logical. You can't just put two and two together and blame it on others.
4.	Spiritual	Bad deeds make us suffer spiritually, our soul should not be degraded by immoral actions and decisions. It is all taken forward in our future births.

When asked if suffering could be eliminated, participants said that eliminating suffering would neither be possible nor desirable. One participant exclaimed: "It is not possible! There is no meaning of happiness without some experience of suffering!" Another participant shared that "There will be nothing in life, if there is no suffering. It is not possible to be only happy and not sad. Similarly, it is not possible to only have bad things in life and nothing good. Always both--*Hasnaa ronaa sab hogaa hi* (laughter and crying will always be part of life)."

Speaking more specifically about the value of suffering, participants perceived suffering as an opportunity for self-refinement. Here are three of the many examples: "Imagine no traffic

jams on the road, no accidents, you will never need to wear glasses, and you won't ever get old or sick. If all this was possible then it's good, in fact it's great! But this won't happen. In this you will have no awareness of real happiness", "There was a reason why life was created this way—to teach us how to appreciate life. There will be ups and downs. We can't progress without suffering! Life will be too boring and monotonous if we don't evolve. Suffering helps us change, we learn from mistakes and experiences of all kinds, and that makes life interesting.", and "These are real life lessons! If you have good and bad times, you become stronger, value happiness and appreciate the good in your life. In your worst phase, you learn a lot—what did I do wrong? What could I change in myself to do better? Who are the people who helped me, supported me in my darkest hour? Those are the people who cared for me and so, they should matter the most to me."

Therefore, suffering was seen as pervasive to the human experience. For example, one adult said: "Suffering and happiness are both fundamental to the human experience and they are related. People who seem happy to you, like from our perspective we feel that they have everything in life, but does that necessarily mean that they are happy? Because human nature is such that we are always longing for something or the other. We inherently seek more in life. So while others don't see or feel it, from our perspective we may not be happy. So suffering is something that only that person can fully experience."

Participants also highlighted the role of suffering in discerning what is good and bad. Unlike the Western moral worldview that may accommodate more clear black and white distinctions between the good and the bad, in the Indian worldview, everything has a *kārmic* basis and one's judgment of good and bad depends on one's station in life. The Indian worldview often presents bad events or experiences as opportunities for self-refinement in the long run. For

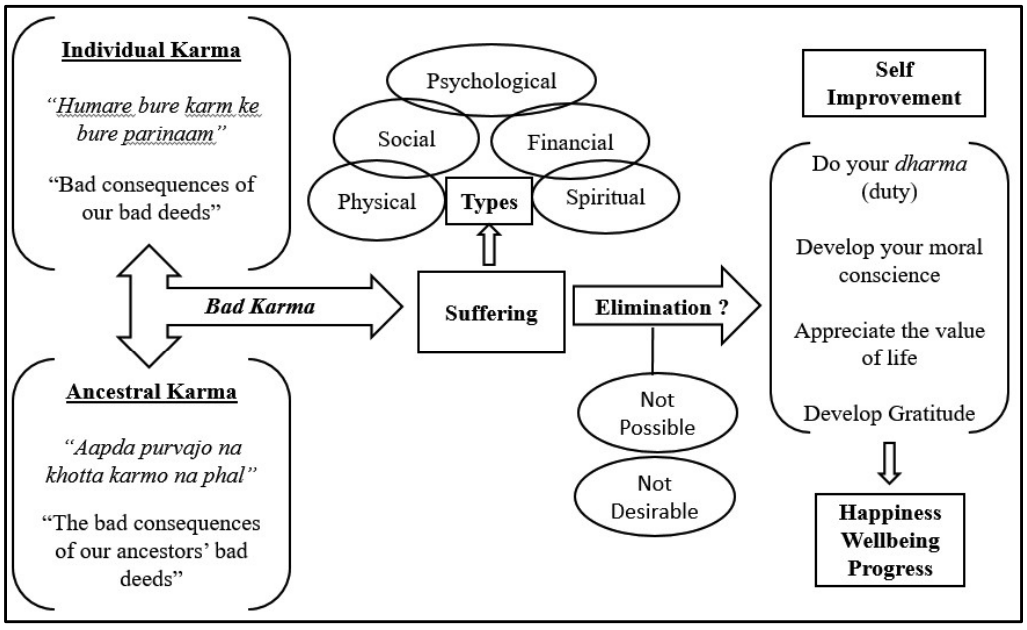
example, one participant said, “In a way, if you don’t suffer, you won’t recognize goodness or happiness. Because you have everything good and easy—a good life, money, education, no hurdles in life so everything is good, fine! But you won’t believe or understand what goodness is. If you suffer, you will learn contentment, gratitude, good, bad and so much more. You see, you can’t progress without suffering!”

Lastly, while there was unanimous agreement among participants about the demanding nature of suffering, there was also agreement that self-improvement was the only way to respond to suffering with equanimity, as one would meet happiness. Adults shared that there were no short-cuts to alleviate suffering. It was perceived as an ordeal everyone had to experience in some form and intensity. For example, one participants explained, “There are no quick solutions for suffering!” Others warned against superstitions and bribery: “If I am suffering, and start thinking that if I offer *prashād* to not one but two Gods today my suffering will go away. Or I am suffering because I haven’t gone to the temple three times a day, not made an offering three times a day, that’s why I am suffering-- but it is not that! This is no cause or solution for your suffering, it will only satisfy you maybe but it is a false sense of satisfaction.” Therefore, participant reasoning reflected the understanding that there could be different means to an end, and that there is no direct cause and effect phenomena in play when it comes to suffering. Participants explained the pivotal role of doing one’s *dharma* as a means of alleviating suffering: “The way to ensure that you have a good life in all respects is to live a life in a *dhārmic* way—do what you should do as a father, husband, son etc. and to do everything with a moral conscience. Try to be away from bad habits and temptations,” and “We should strive to live a life such that our children can learn how to be a righteous person as they grow up. If we believe in a superpower then we have to realize that power within us and perform our duties well.” Role-

related and responsibility-bound awareness of one's duties was therefore prominent in adult moral discourse. Additionally, there was a sense of ownership and responsibility of one's actions, choices and virtues. Therefore, there was clarity about what is the right path (following one's *dharma*) as well as the tools to follow (good *karma* and virtuous living).

Figure 17

Beliefs about Karma and Suffering



Participants also described how self-improvement could also have a ripple effect and result in more positive relationships, thoughts and outcomes. For example, one participant said, "If you work on yourself and improve yourself, then you can also improve your relations with others—like your spouse or even the organization you work in. For example, if you are an employer and your employees have formed a union to demand an increment in salaries, this kind of a situation can lead to great suffering for your company, yourself and also your family. If you review your attitude and beliefs about the situation, see if your policies are in place and find a solution then that will result in progress. Instead, if you have anger or negative thoughts, if you are depressed or aggressive, or worse—if you just complain and remain stubborn about your decisions, then

you will not find happiness or success. And you will suffer." Therefore, participants explained that the key to happiness, progress and wellbeing was to work on themselves in order to alleviate suffering.

Summary of Results for Study 3

1. Ideas of selfhood that emerged from participant responses reflected a fluid sense of self, one that is not fixed but evolves in response to changing time, circumstances, social roles and *dharma* in different stages of life.
2. Participants spoke of an inherent interface between the self and the divine, with organic linkages between the self, mind and *shraddhā.*
3. Lastly, results show that suffering was perceived as intrinsic to the human experience—impossible to avoid and in fact, undesirable to eliminate. It was seen as a necessary transformative process for the self. Doing good *karma* (deeds)*,* performing one's *dharma* (duty), keeping *shraddhā* (trust, faith) and a positive mindset were crucial to alleviate suffering and enhance general wellbeing.