Moral Universals, Ancient Culture and Indian Youth: 
Part II - Facing the Challenge of Westernization

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India is known for her rich, ancient culture and tradition. From the evidence cited in the first part of this paper (Renner, Ramalingam, & Pirta, 2013), all five components of the Moral Foundations Theory may be expected to be emphasized by Indian culture (Graham et al., 2011). This paper presents additional evidence for westernization in India and recommends that Indian youth, while accepting the challenge of westernization, should remain aware of their unprecedented cultural and spiritual heritage. Theoretical arguments and empirical findings point to the importance of cultural identity in order to preserve self-esteem, well-being, and coping resources.

Keywords: Cultural psychology, Moral Foundations Theory, Westernization, cultural identity, well-being.

Everywhere, human beings want to understand causal explanations of suffering (Shweder, 2000; Shweder, Much, Mahapatra & Park, 2003). They include inter-personal, biomedical and moral modes of causal explanations of suffering. The most interesting and yet little explored by psychologists is the moral mode. Out of the other two modes, interpersonal refers to largely blaming others for our miseries, and the biomedical explanations involve finding causes and cure of suffering in material objects. In the moral mode, the agent takes responsibility of its suffering and searches the answer to eliminate it through wisdom and reasoning, and where culture is a significant factor. Morality involves mastering knowledge and intelligence so that the agent acquires effective use of his/her abilities of discrimination and judgment. Shweder et al. (2003) in their analysis of moral discourse of the residents of the old town of Bhubaneswar, Orissa abstracted three clusters of ethics which individuals follow to maintain order in society—the Ethics of Autonomy, the Ethics of Community, and the Ethics of Divinity—as a result of which suffering is avoidable. In other words, they are the laws of personal responsibility as enshrined in the Hindu concept of karma.

In Part I of this paper, Renner, Ramalingam, and Pirta (2013) explored current evidence on moral issues as evidenced by Moral Foundation Theory (Graham et al., 2011), in Part – II the question is whether Indian youth growing in certain cultural and religious milieu face the challenge of westernization and globalization. It is reasonable to hypothesize, if these moral codes have functional value in maintaining order in a social system, and in turn, avoids suffering of an agent. They may also have value for the individual in other human social systems. However, different social systems have evolved apparently different moral codes. Though they may appear extremely divergent, they can be classified under these three ethics of autonomy, community, and divinity. Cultures also vary by inculcating each of these three moral codes to a great or lesser extent, for example, Western societies may give more emphasis on autonomy whereas some Eastern cultures prefer divinity. At certain stages of human development, moral codes of divinity and community were perhaps functionally significant in maintaining order in a social system, but in modern global scenario, autonomy codes apparently have greater functional value.